Laura Bridgman : the story of an opened door / by Laura E. Richards; prefatory note by William H. Burnham.

Laura Bridgman

The Story of an Opened Door

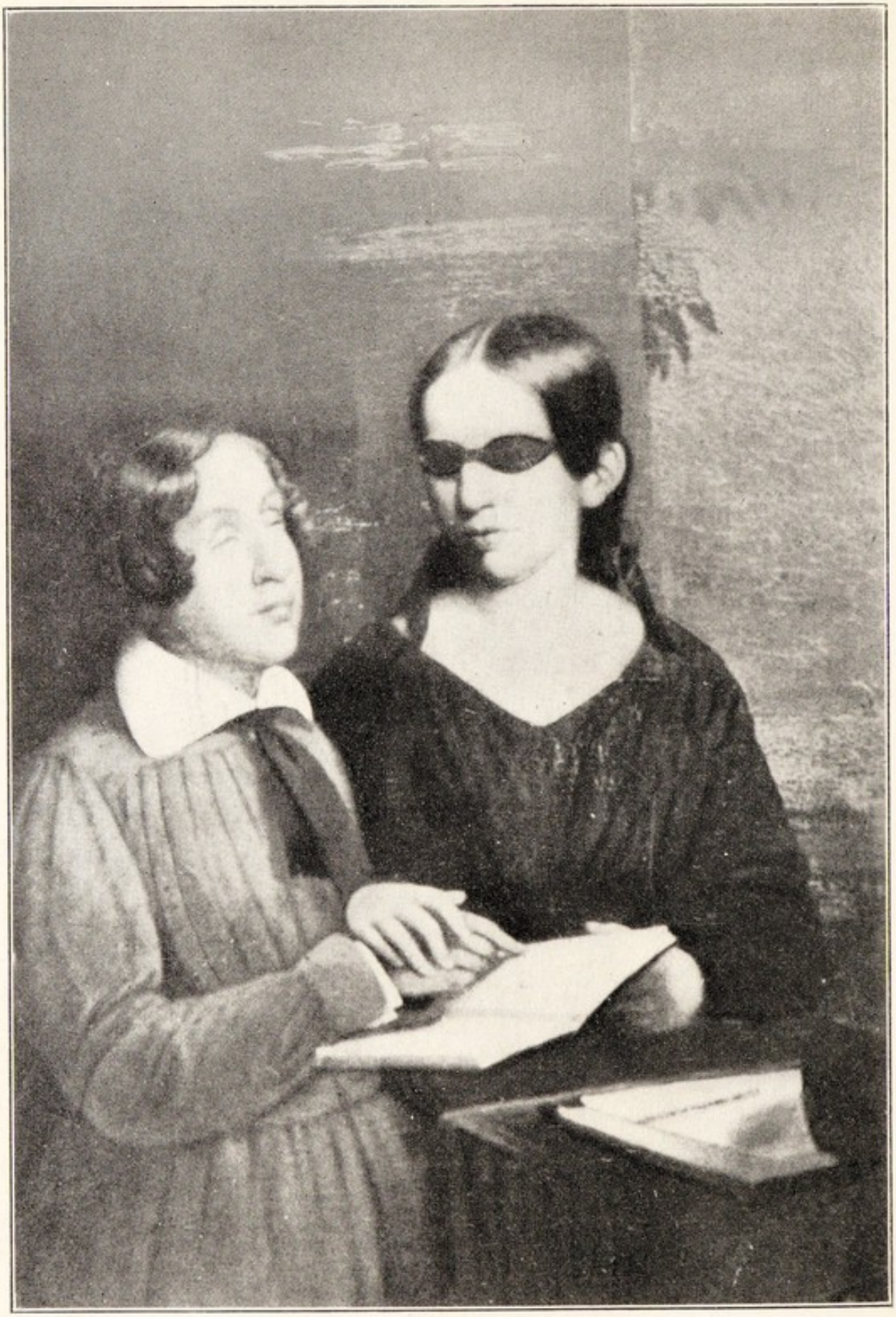
&

Laura E. Richards

Laura Bridgman

Books By LAURA E. RICHARDS

LAURA BRIDGMAN:
THE STORY OF AN OPENED DOOR
THE SQUIRE
IN BLESSED CYRUS
JOAN OF ARC
A DAUGHTER OF JEHU
ABIGAIL ADAMS AND HER TIMES
PIPPIN
ELIZABETH FRY
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
MRS. TREE
MRS. TREE'S WILL
MISS JIMMY
THE WOOING OF CALVIN PARKS
JOURNAL AND LETTERS OF SAMUEL GRIDLEY HOWE
TWO NOBLE LIVES
CAPTAIN JANUARY
A HAPPY LITTLE TIME
WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE
FIVE MINUTE STORIES
IN MY NURSERY
THE GOLDEN WINDOWS
THE SILVER CROWN
THE JOYOUS STORY OF TOTO
THE LIFE OF JULIA WARD HOWE
(With Maude Howe Elliott)



Laura teaching Oliver Caswell to read

Laura Bridgman

The Story of an Opened Door

By

Laura E. Richards

Prefatory Note by William H. Burnham, Ph.D.

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New York 1928 London

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To

EDWARD E. ALLEN,

worthy successor of

SAMUEL GRIDLEY HOWE

and

MICHAEL ANAGNOS

who as Principal of the
Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School
for the Blind
has for twenty years carried on with high intelligence,
wide vision, and unfailing devotion the work initiated
by Dr. Howe, this volume is dedicated with affectionate
regard.

PREFATORY NOTE

Laura Bridgman has aroused a fourfold interest in the American public: first, as illustrating an educational event of the first importance, showing that, of the sensory avenues of information to the mind, the two master senses, as they are usually called, may be cut off with little if any apparent decrease of intelligence; second, by showing the significance of the special education of defectives; third, as an interesting personality; fourth, as furnishing an opportunity for scientific research in psychology, language, and the development of the human brain.

The first two of these interests were stimulated by Dr. Howe in his masterly reports of the Perkins Institution, a man who was capable of seeing the wider relations and the larger significance of the education of defectives and possessing the enthusiasm and ability to make this known to the public. The third interest was stimulated by Laura Bridgman's autobiography and the extended biographies by her teachers and friends. The fourth and more specially scientific interest was stimulated by the studies of her mental development and the acquisition of language with its neural basis by scientific

specialists. The study of Laura Bridgman's psychological development was made by G. Stanley Hall; the special investigation of her brain, the organs of speech and the speech center in the brain, by the eminent neurologist, Dr. Henry H. Donaldson, assisted by Dr. A. C. Getchell, specialist in laryngology; and the study of her general linguistic ability, by Dr. Edmund C. Sanford.

The deep psychological interest, both in this country and in Europe, in her education and development, is illustrated in the exhaustive monograph by G. Stanley Hall. In 1878 Dr. Hall made experiments with her, the results of which and of his extended study of the literature are embodied in his paper on Laura Bridgman, published in his *Aspects of German Culture*. This monograph, written with Dr. Hall's usual suggestiveness and breadth of vision, is a valuable but technical study; and yet in the following simple figure the author gives a suggestive illustration of her mental processes: "Laura is not unlike one sitting forever in the mouth of a cave, gazing at the play of shadows cast upon objects without, which one never sees, by light entering from behind. All the objects which we see and hear are to her but shadows flitting across the single sense of touch; or, again, as if objects of three were represented in a space of two dimensions."

It so happens, if I mistake not, that all of these

books and monographs are now out of print; and thus it is specially desirable that a brief biography giving a résumé of the important and more generally interesting features of this unique character should be made. Mrs. Richards, the author of the present sketch, is specially fitted for her task, herself a daughter of Dr. Howe, acquainted at first hand with significant events surrounding the life and education of Laura Bridgman, familiar with the details recounted in the earlier lives of Laura Bridgman, and a writer of note, with the insight and ability to select significant events and to prepare a brief and trustworthy story of this remarkable phenomenon of nineteenth century education. I wish to voice the gratitude of the American public for this painstaking and interesting biography.

WILLIAM H. BURNHAM

INTRODUCTION

The life of Laura Bridgman, written by my sisters, Florence Howe Hall and Maud Howe Elliott, will remain her chief memorial. As it has been long out of print, it is thought well now to supplement it by a brief rehearsal of the main facts of her life and of Dr. Howe's connection therewith.

We are told that: "Every human life is a potential contribution to education and to science. If the individual is fortunate enough to be the object of competent study, this potential contribution becomes an actual one." [1]

In the light of these words, Laura Bridgman was fortunate indeed. Dr. Howe, her "deliverer," as he has often been called (though "awakener" may be the better word), brought to the study of her case a highly trained mind, remarkable powers of observation, analysis, and deduction, and a sympathy and tenderness which knew no bounds.

He had already given some years to the study of defective humanity. Not the blind alone, but the deaf, the insane and the feeble-minded, had been the objects of his deepest consideration and his most earnest labor.

---

[1] William H. Burnham.

I have called this little book "The Story of an Opened Door"; but there is something more than this. In this mysterious process called Education, anything, it would seem, may help, anything may hinder. The defective child, through his very defects and the attention called to them, eventually brings needed help to the normal child.

"Mental hygiene . . . was developed first for defective and feeble-minded children, then applied to normal children; now the special need of it for superior children is indicated by the recent studies."

Thus writes Dr. William H. Burnham, in his admirable work on *The Normal Mind*. Following this line of thought, one feels as if Laura's story might be of value in ways perhaps yet unthought of.

After her death, her brain was examined, weighed, measured, analyzed, the results published with anatomical observations by Dr. H. H. Donaldson. To the uninitiated, these and the psychological observations by Dr. Hall convey little more than the deep feeling that nothing is ever lost. To the initiated what may they not still have to say?

Laura's mind was not defective, it was eccentric. Her language, her processes of thought, her translation of these into speech and action, were all individual, unusual; hence her life was one of special interest to experts, *apart from her infirmity*. This is abundantly shown not only in the records of her own time, but in the attention paid since then to

her case. Scientists like G. Stanley Hall, Dr. W. H. Burnham, Dr. H. H. Donaldson, Dr. E. C. Sanford, Mr. Edward E. Allen, have found in it something bearing upon their own work; her shaded candle has thrown light along their path, onward and upward.

L. E. R.

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It is to Dr. Howe more than to any other one man that Massachusetts owes what is best in her charitable system. He had shown his great capacity for philanthropic work by his masterly administration of the gifts sent to the Greeks in 1827-28, but his first definite task was the organization of the Asylum for the Blind, between 1832 and 1842. In the first thirty years of his life, Dr. Howe was exhibiting his character rather than performing his true work, or perhaps we might better describe this period as his apprenticeship, and his journey-work—the "Lehrjahre" and "Wanderjahre" of the great German romance. He was now, in the summer of 1832, about to begin on his actual task in life, the uplifting of the race by education and by the creation of an original institution of philanthropy. Such in fact was the Massachusetts School and Asylum for the Blind—the pioneer of such establishments in America, and the most illustrious of its class in the world. It was in fact a work of constructive genius, and the true place of Dr. Howe is not with men of talent, like Horace Mann and Theodore Parker, but with men of genius like Emerson and Carlyle, who were

his contemporaries. He planted for others to reap the harvest, and while men were admiring what he had achieved, he had already quitted that achievement, and was passing on to something newer. When his arrow had once hit the mark, he did not repeat the shot, but aimed higher, until the shaft kindled in the air like that of Virgil's Trojan Archer, and flew onward toward Olympus. He was therefore ever unsatisfied, unresting; the goal receded as he gained it; and a new ambition constantly replaced his earlier ones.

F. B. SANBORN

CHAPTER I

THE NEW HAMPSHIRE FARMHOUSE

Ye who have eyes and see not, and have ears and hear not; ye who are as the hypocrites of sad countenances, and disfigure your faces that ye may seem unto men to fast; learn healthy cheerfulness, and mild contentment, from the deaf, dumb, and blind! Self-elected saints with gloomy brows, this sightless, earless, voiceless child may teach you lessons you will do well to follow. Let that poor hand of hers lie gently on your hearts!

CHARLES DICKENS.

There floats not upon the stream of life any wreck of humanity so utterly shattered and crippled that its signals of distress should not challenge attention and command assistance.

S. G. HOWE.

LAURA DEWEY BRIDGMAN was born on December 21, 1829; being the third daughter of Daniel Bridgman, a substantial farmer, and Harmony his wife. The Bridgman homestead stood in the township of Hanover, New Hampshire; a roomy, comfortable old farmhouse. There was a parlor, consecrated to funerals and other solemnities; the family lived in the ample, sunny kitchen. Here Harmony Bridgman ruled. Here she spun, wove, made and knitted all the clothes for her five children and herself; here she churned, baked, cooked (over the great open fireplace; no "cookstove" in those days!), made soap and candles. Besides all this she raised poultry, bees, lambs, and brought up five children. Truly a notable woman! She seems to have been of strong character and good intelligence, as was Daniel her husband. Both were pillars of the Baptist church.

To what extent Mrs. Bridgman's tremendous output of work was responsible for Laura's being a puny baby, it were idle now to inquire. Puny she was, and rickety; subject moreover to disturbances of the nervous system, which in those days passed under the general name of "fits." These fits recurred, at various intervals, until she was about a year and a half old, materially retarding and inter-

fering with the normal growth and development which should have been going on. At about twenty months old, her baby strength seemed to rally. The tortured nerves grew quiet. All her senses seemed normal; for four months she became, says Dr. Howe, "apparently well."

Had this condition prevailed, there would be a far different story to tell; the story of a normal, quiet life. But this was not to be. At two years old Laura was attacked by scarlet fever of a virulent type, which raged violently through the frail organism, "destroying the organs of sight and hearing, blunting the sense of smell, and prostrating her whole system so completely that recovery seemed impossible. She was kept in bed, in a darkened room, for about five months, and was ill and feeble for two years." [1]

At four years old we may think of Laura as restored to health, so far as might be. Blind,[2] deaf, dumb, with little sense of smell or taste; but active, intelligent, indomitable. Her hard-working parents had little time to give her; the older children were probably at school—we find little or no mention of them in the records of her childhood. She played about the ample kitchen, or sat before the fire in the little cane armchair made for her by her grandfather Bridgman, nursing the cat, or an old boot

[1] *Journals and Letters of Samuel Gridley Howe.*

[2] Up to her seventh year she could dimly perceive a brilliant light, but this power had disappeared before Dr. Howe saw her.

of her father's, which was her sole plaything. In later years, she thus recalls this time:

"I had a man's large boot, which I called my little baby. I enjoyed myself in playing with the artifical [*sic*] Baby very much. . . . I did not feel so solitary with a Baby as I should have felt if I had not [had] one." [3]

She was a slender, delicate-looking child, with a finely formed head, oval face, regular features; all fair and promising, except for the red hollows where the eyes should be. Dr. Howe thus pictures her at this time:

"What a situation was hers! The darkness and the silence of the tomb were around her; no mother's smile called forth her answering smile,—no father's voice taught her to imitate its sounds: to her, brothers and sisters were but forms of matter which resisted her touch, but which differed not from the furniture of the house, save in warmth and in the power of locomotion; and not even in these respects from the dog and the cat.

"But the immortal spirit which had been implanted within her could not die, nor be maimed or mutilated; and though most of its avenues of communication with the world were cut off, it began to manifest itself through the others. As soon as she could walk she began to explore the room, and then the house. She became familiar with the form, density, weight, and heat of every article she could

[3] Laura Bridgman, *History of My Life.*

lay her hands upon. She followed her mother, and felt of her hands and arms, as she was occupied about the house; and her disposition to imitate led her to repeat everything herself. She even learned to sew a little, and to knit."

Harmony Bridgman was kind to her afflicted child, and did what she could for her, was patient and forbearing but, as has been said, had little time to give her. And yet—she taught her how to sew and knit!

The Bridgmans were not a demonstrative family. There was no petting or fondling of any of the children, I fancy; certainly not of Laura: "I never knew," she says, speaking of this earliest time, "how to kiss my boot, nor any of my folks."

And yet—again—her memories are mostly of *enjoyment*. *The History of My Life,* written in 1854, is in many ways an extraordinary document, but in nothing more remarkable than in being largely a record of pleasures. Even in the desperate months of her illness there were pleasures never to be forgotten.

"As soon as I began to get a little better, it delighted my Mother very highly, who had been so gloomy watching me constantly. I used to recline in a very nice and comfortable cradle for a great number of months. I enjoyed myself so very much in lying in my nest. Many of different persons were very attentive and tender and patient to me whilst I resided with my Parents until I attained not exactly

the eighth year. . . . I seated my self in the little rocking chair before [the] fire a great many mornings whilst my Mother was preparing breakfast which was absolutely essential to the family's lives. I enjoyed myself in rocking back ward and forward constantly. My dearest friend Mr. Tenny gave me a thin tin plate with the edge printed in the blind alphabet. I occupied [used] it daily with much pleasure."

Even the family grindstone ministered to the child's delight.

"I used to turn it around in the pure water; it amused and delighted me very much to do it.

"I was very full of mischief and fun. I was in such high spirits generally. I would cling to my Mother so wildly and peevishly many times. I took hold of her legs or arms as she strode across the room. She acted so plain, as if it irritated her very much indeed. She scolded me sternly. I could not help feeling so cross and uneasy against her. I did not know any better. I never was taught to cultivate patience and mildness and placid [ity], until I came away from my blessed family at home."

Sometimes the high spirits carried her into more serious trouble.

"I loved to sport with the cat very much. One morning I was sitting in my little rocking chair before the fire. I stretched out my hand toward the old cat and drew her up to my side. I indulged myself in having a game with her. it was so cruel a sport for

the poor living being. I was extremely indiscreet and ignorant. I rejected the poor creature in to the hot fire. my Mother came rushing suddenly and rescued the cat from her danger. She seemed very impulsive with [for?] the insent [instant?] she shook and slapped me most sternly for my committing a sin against her dear cat. she punished me so severely that I could not endure the effect of it for a long time. She held two of the cat's paws up for me to discerne the mark of the flame of fire. my conscience told me at length that it was truly very wicked in me to have done a harm to her. It was very strange for the cat to go with the greatest fearful suspection [suspicion]. she concealed herself so lucky [in] some [woods]. The old cat never brought her company to her oldest home since she was banished from our sight. I cannot ask her the reason why she never retraced her natural steps. I am positive that it must be reality of her death now. The favorite cat had not faith in us that we should treat her more kindly and tenderly again."

Laura's writing was all her own; she was largely a law unto herself. Usually correct in speech, she could not be brought to feel the necessity of taking time and paper enough for her writing, but hurried through it, with frequent elisions and abbreviations which were clear to her own mind, but not to the eyes of readers. She loved new words, and long words; when at a loss, she would invent what seemed to her a good one. "I exerted myself to articulate [com-

municate] with the people, but I was inarticulatible or incomprehensible." (Elsewhere she makes the latter word "incomprhensible," practicing a kind of short-hand.)

For her outdoor exercise and amusement, she turned to the only friend of her childhood, Asa Tenney, a singular old man, living neighbor to the Bridgmans, considered by some an eccentric, by some almost a "natural." Dr. Howe says that he was regarded as "a sort of philosopher with a crack in his skull." He had no book learning, but was passionately fond of the outdoor world. He became devotedly attached to Laura, and she to him. As soon as her little feet were strong enough to carry her, he used to lead her off into the woods and fields, and would keep her happy and interested for hours together. He taught her the difference between land and water by leading her to the brookside, and putting her hand in the running stream. From him, too, she may have learned the varieties of texture in leaf and blade, in stick and stone. Her sense of touch, already fine, became, as we shall later see, almost preternaturally acute. The hours with "Uncle Asa," as he was called, were probably the happiest of her childhood. They had a silent language of their own, it seemed, and never tired of sitting hand in hand on some green bank, or by some woodland stream, in wordless, happy communion; it was a strange and lovely companionship. For the old man, it sufficed; he asked no more. For the child, it was but the first

page of the book of life; yet she never forgot her earliest friend. Her memories of him fill more space in the *History* than those of all others together.

Uncle Asa seems to have been for some time an inmate of the Bridgman household.

"Mr. Tenny was one of my greatest and best benefactors; he loved me as much as if I was his own Daughter; I always loved him as a Brother. . . . I was so very happy to stay with him constantly and forever. . . . I felt much farther familiar with him than my Father. . . . He did not know how to talk with his fingers for my sake, but he contrived how to make me understand by some signs which he showed me. . . . Once I seized his spectacles from his poor eyes and crushed them with great fury. he never had a mind to scold or punish me for doing a harm. He never got impatient with me or other children while he lived with me at home. . . . My dear Mother liked to accomodate him to my blessed home for a great while on account of my happiness. Whenever he was at liberty to go out of the doors with me, he would take hold of my cunning hands so tenderly; occasionally, he would lift me up in his arms very cautiously. I used to sit down with him on a very green carpet of grass very frequently. I always loved to protract my time in the most pure and balmy air. I was very fond of rambling about the world with him. We used to proceed through the meadows during the delightful weather. some times he picked up a tiny switch from the ground and

mange [managed?] it in my little hand to stoop low on the coast of a brook or of a pond and hold the stick in the water and feel the flowing of the water that flowed down from time to time. I do not recollect how the water naturally glided; and how it looked so blue by the sky. [The blind use the words "look" and "see" exactly as seeing persons do; touch being for them what sight is for us.] he took numerous stones and induced me to throw them in to the water for my amusement and also a lesson, but he was very incapable of instructing me Geography. I do not know how long he resided with my Mother. . . . He felt very much discouraged and sad to part with me suddenly, when I was almost 8 years of age. He was so suspicious of my being so cruelly stolen from his hands. he thought that some one was decided to cast me in prison. but he was very ignorant and inconprhensible about my loss, which made him mourn greatly. He was much confused in his poor mind; he could not help thinking of me constantly. . . . I wish most truly that I had [had] the privilege of communing with the blessed man as long as I saw him at my own home. I should have enjoyed my life much more, had I had the capacity of making the finger alphabet."

Evidently Laura's mind was awake, alert, inquiring. She knew the various members of the household, and seemed to be fond of them; loved to be noticed and caressed; loved also to have her own will. "But her mind and spirit were as cruelly

cramped by her isolation as the foot of a Chinese girl is cramped by an iron shoe. Growth would go on; and without room to grow naturally, deformity must follow." [4]

In her relations with those around her, she could distinguish pleasure and displeasure in others. When she was good, she was patted on the head; when she was naughty, her hand or her head was rubbed; a pull meant "Come!" a push meant "Go!" This was all. There was nothing to reach the moral sense, which wakes first in the form of reverence. Laura knew nothing to revere except strength; already she was beginning to disregard her mother's authority, and yield only to her father, whose hand was strong and heavy, and who could stamp his foot, not in anger, but with such force that the vibrations thrilled the child's nerves and made her feel that he must be obeyed.

Laura, at seven, stood at the parting of the ways. Good and evil were striving within her; she might grow into a gentle, docile woman, or into a ferocious and unmanageable one. Which was it to be?

"The moving finger wrote": the page was turned. Strangely enough, the great change which was coming to Laura Bridgman began with as prosaic a matter as could well be found: the making out of the tax bills of the town of Hanover. The selectmen were mostly farmers; the time was May, when every hour of a farmer's time has twenty calls upon

[4] Dr. S. G. Howe.

it. They looked about them for help, and chanced upon a young Dartmouth student, James Barrett, who was not too busy to devote some hours to the task. Daniel Bridgman was a selectman, and his farm was handy by; the papers were taken there, and young Barrett came to straighten them out. In the pauses of his work his keen young eyes roved hither and thither, taking note of everything, especially of the blind child sitting mute and helpless in her little chair, nursing the old boot, or playing with the cat.

The sight moved him so deeply that he reported the case to Dr. Mussey, then head of the medical department at Dartmouth, and begged him to go and see for himself. Dr. Mussey went, and was in turn so much impressed that he wrote an account of Laura for the press. This came to the notice of Dr. Samuel G. Howe, Director of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind.[5] Dr. Howe,

[5] I use the name familiar to all. As a matter of fact, the Institution has had several names. In the first report (1833), it is stated that "it is four years since an act incorporating the Trustees of the New England Asylum for the Blind was passed by the Legislature of Massachusetts." Yet this report itself bears the title, "Address of the Trustees of the New England Institution for the Education of the Blind." The change shows the hand of Dr. Howe. He strongly disliked the word "asylum" and all its connotations. In 1857 he writes thus to Mr. Chapin, of the Philadelphia Institution for the Blind:

"The more I reflect upon the subject the more I see objections in principle and practice to *asylums*. What right have we to pack off the poor, the old, the blind into asylums? They are of us, our brothers, our sisters—they belong in families; they are deprived of the dearest relations of life in being put away

then a young man, had recently entered on the second phase of his adventurous life. After six years of fighting in the Greek War of Independence (he was, at first, surgeon in the Greek army, and then surgeon-in-chief to the fleet, but his brother officers said he would perform his professional duties only when the fighting was over!), he had returned to his native country to undertake for the rest of his life the long war against "sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity." In 1832 he became the virtual founder and lifelong director of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind.

Dr. Howe saw Dr. Mussey's account of Laura's case, and kindled like a torch. He had already pondered the subject of blind deaf-mutes. In the common law of England they were classed with idiots and criminals, as outside the pale of human society; the blind deaf-mute of old days was not imprisoned, save in that stark dungeon, his body.[6] He might be found

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in masses in asylums. Asylums generally are the offspring of a low order of feeling; their chief recommendation often is that they do *cheaply* what we ought to think only of doing *well.*"

The Institution was then (1833) located at No. 140 Pleasant Street, Boston, the home of Dr. Howe's father. The next year, 1834, saw the gift of Colonel Perkins of his house and grounds in Pearl Street, and the moving of the infant Institution to its second home; yet it is not till the eighth report (1840) that we find the name, "Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind." "Asylum" again! How or why the word crept back I know not; probably some conservative trustee insisted upon it; it remained in use until 1877.

[6] *My body that my dungeon is,*
And all my parks and palaces.
R. L. Stevenson.

in almshouse or "work'us," sitting dumb and helpless; fed and treated like an animal, differing little from one except in the fact of being clothed. Dr. Howe had before now revolted at this verdict of law and society. He had studied carefully the case of Julia Brace, a blind deaf-mute in the American Asylum at Hartford, and felt that though the attempt to educate her had failed, failure was not inevitable. His motto through life was: "Obstacles are things to be overcome"; here was an obstacle deserving and requiring all possible effort.

He went at once to Hanover, and saw the child and her mother. Laura was frightened, for she had met few strangers in her little life, and this one was taller than any one she knew, and different—she felt instantly—from any one. He took her hand kindly; gave her a silver pencil case, which she dropped in her terror; made no attempt to force her inclination, but studied her quietly and keenly, while talking with Mrs. Bridgman.

Laura, in her *History of My Life,* gives her own recollection of this interview.

"When I attained the 8th year living with my very dear Mother, A gentleman went to see me at my home. I would not venture to go to her spare parlour with her; for I was so very shy and timid. she introduced me to the noblest visitor, but I shrunk myself as hastily as I had strength. He took my tiny hand and greet[ed] me most cordially. he seemed

to be [such] a very unusually tall [man] to me, that it made me feel much repelled, because I never saw so tall a man before in my life. It was Dr. S. G. Howe whom I could not know or like. It was perfectly kind in him to leave the first Insti. and go so far to beseech [seek] me at Hanover which was so much more expensive for him to travel than of late. A person discovered a little girl whose name was Lily Bridgman [so it seems to read in the manuscript] and brought news to the good Dr. he was greatly interested in me; so he hastened himself and hunted for me for various reason[s]. The noble Dr. brought me a silver pencil to my home. He lay it in my little hand, but it agitated me so much that I disputed [?] the nice gift and lost it some where. I did not calculate his generosity and love in me. I do not know how long he passed with my Mother. He communed with my parents about my leaving them in this particular case for use of [for the sake of] my education. he was so extremely anxious that I should come to be taught immediately. My dear Mother and Father were exceedingly gratified at the proposal he gave them for my important exercise of mind and faculties."

His examination concluded, Dr. Howe laid the case before Mr. and Mrs. Bridgman, and begged them earnestly to give Laura into his care for a time. Fortunately they were good and intelligent people, with the welfare of the child solely at heart. They consented, and Laura was brought to the In-

stitution for the Blind, in October, 1837, being then seven years old.

For once, she has no "enjoyment" to chronicle.

"I felt much grieved and tormented to leave my native town so suddenly. . . . I dreaded leaving home so much that it made me shed an abundance of tears from my eyes many long days. The time elapsed so very heavily and painfully that I did not know what to do with myself. I kept clinging on my dear parents, so as to not let them escape from me, but did not succeed in detaining them. I was removed from them; they attemted to avoid me as quickly as possible. at the very moment that I lost them I burst in[to] bitterest tears. Miss J. Howe, one of the Dr.'s Sisters, was with me then. She tried to pacify and sooth me, but my poor heart was too full of sorrow and trouble. I was so much more homesick to retrace my steps home than I could bear in my power. . . . I had a very sad and pleasant time with Miss J."

No enjoyment; but "a sad and pleasant time"; the joyous spirit could not be entirely quelled.

"Perkins" is the name beloved by recent generations of pupils and graduates; but for many a long year it was "The Institution." There were hundreds of other institutions, of every sort and description, in every state of the Union. No matter! to those who loved it, there was but one Institution, with a capital I.

The Institution, then, was still established in Colonel Perkins' house in Pearl Street, when Daniel and Harmony Bridgman brought their little girl to Boston, and sorrowfully yet trustingly left her in Dr. Howe's hands.

CHAPTER II

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"

Laura Bridgman's name is a household word; forty years ago her education was followed with the most eager and general interest, and her case has become a classic in psychological literature.

E. C. SANFORD.

ONE can envisage the first scene when, her parents gone, Laura found herself alone with the "unusually tall man," seen only once before. Dr. Howe, standing before the silent child, his keen, intent gaze fixed upon her, studying, planning, resolving; the child herself, slender, light and agile, responsive in all ways save the most vital ones: in them, impenetrable.

We know the intensity of feeling and purpose that inspired the young man; we can but faintly imagine the agony of doubt and fear, of longing and anguish, that possessed the child; taken, she knew not why, she hardly knew how, from the one familiar spot of earth; brought to a place where the very size and scale of things must have seemed a terrible immensity.

At first the poor child was utterly bewildered. Instead of the close-sheltering walls of the farmhouse, here were spacious rooms, where for many paces there was nothing to touch. Instead of the homely figures, every line of which was familiar, strange forms of men and women, whose clothes had an unaccustomed "feel," whose movements were new and different; instead of her little rocking-chair where she sat and nursed her "boot," large pieces of furniture, whose very polish was new to the little

delicate searching fingers. Everything new and strange, except the one figure, the tall, strong man who, she already knew, was her friend. Small wonder that she clung to "the Doctor" with eager, terrified hands, and could not let him go. The bond already formed grew stronger day by day; was to hold while both lived.

At first, and for some time, she lived with Dr. Howe and his sister in his private rooms at the Institution. Here, after some days of pathetic drooping, she began to revive, and eagerly investigated her new surroundings. She found that the strange chairs were comfortable; that the walls of the wide rooms were after all easily reached; that every touch on hand or head was gentle and kind. She felt good will all about her, and in her friend something else; something new; something that seemed to urge her on, forward, step by new step, into a wider, freer world than she had before known.

The Doctor waited two weeks before he began on the course of instruction which he had been carefully planning out ever since he first saw Laura. He must choose one of two ways. He could build on the foundation already laid in her home life; teach her a language of signs, such as was in general use at that time among seeing deaf-mutes. (Blind deaf-mutes had never been taught anything definite: under the law, as has been said, they ranked with idiots and lunatics.) He could do this, easily enough. The alternative was, in his own words, "to teach her the

purely arbitrary language in common use: (among deaf-mutes) that is, to give her a sign for every individual thing; or to give her a knowledge of letters, by the combination of which she might express her idea of the existence, and the mode and condition of existence, of anything. The former would have been easy, but very ineffectual; the latter seemed very difficult, but, if accomplished, very effectual. I determined, therefore, to try the latter."

The resolve was made: the obstacle was to be overcome. The method is thus described by him, in the once world-famous Ninth Report of the Perkins Institution:

"The first experiments were made by taking articles in common use, such as knives, forks, spoons, keys, etc., and pasting upon them labels with their names in raised letters. These she felt of very carefully, and soon, of course, distinguished that the crooked lines *spoon* differed as much from the crooked lines *key,* as the spoon differed from the key in form.

"Then small detached labels, with the same words printed upon them, were put into her hands; and she soon observed that they were similar to the ones pasted on the articles. She showed her perception of this similarity by laying the label *key* upon the key, and the label *spoon* upon the spoon. She was here encouraged by the natural sign of approbation, patting on the head.

"The same process was then repeated with all the

articles which she could handle; and she very easily learned to place the proper labels upon them. It was evident, however, that the only intellectual exercise was that of imitation and memory. She recollected that the label *book* was placed upon a book, and she repeated the process, first from imitation, next from memory, with no other motive than the love of approbation, and apparently without the intellectual perception of any relation between the things.

"After a while, instead of labels, the individual letters were given to her on detached pieces of paper: they were arranged side by side, so as to spell *book, key,* etc.; then they were mixed up in a heap, and a sign was made for her to arrange them so as to express the words *book, key,* etc., and she did so."

This routine was carefully and vigilantly followed during many weeks. Dr. Howe continues:

"Hitherto the process had been mechanical, and the success about as great as teaching a very knowing dog a variety of tricks. The poor child had sat in mute amazement, and patiently imitated everything her teacher did; but now the truth began to flash upon her—her intellect began to work—she perceived that here was a way by which she could herself make up a sign of anything that was in her own mind, and show it to another mind; and at once her countenance lighted up with a human expression: it was no longer a dog, or parrot,—it was an immortal spirit, eagerly seizing upon a new link of union with other spirits! I could almost fix upon the moment when

this truth dawned upon her mind, and spread its light to her countenance. I saw that the great obstacle was overcome, and that henceforward nothing but patient and persevering, though plain and straightforward efforts were to be used.

"The result, thus far, is quickly related, and easily conceived; but not so was the process; for many weeks of apparently unprofitable labor were passed before it was effected.

"When it was said above, that a sign was made, it was intended to say, that the action was performed by her teacher, she feeling of his hands, and then imitating the motion."

He used to say that the moment so simply described above was one of the happiest of his life: the moment when he saw the light flash into the child's face, and knew that spirit had touched spirit. Many years after, recalling this time, he says of it:

"It sometimes occurred to me that she was like a person alone and helpless in a deep, dark, still pit, and that I was letting down a cord and dangling it about, in hopes she might find it; and that finally she would seize it by chance, and, clinging to it, be drawn up by it into the light of day and into human society. And it did so happen; and thus she, instinctively and unconsciously, aided in her happy deliverance."

From step to step. A set of metal types was made, with the letters of the alphabet cast upon their ends; with this, a board with square holes into which the types fitted. When handed a pencil, a watch, a knife,

she would select the proper letters, and fitting them into her board, read with eager fingers the word she had formed. This exercise was carried on for several weeks, till she had a good vocabulary at her command. Then came the next step, a great one: that of teaching her how to represent the different letters with her fingers, in the finger-alphabet of the deaf-mutes. With amazement and delight Dr. Howe watched the child as she grappled with this new problem.

"Her teacher gives her a new object,—for instance a pencil,—first lets her examine it, and get an idea of its use, then teaches her how to spell it by making the signs for the letters with her own fingers: the child grasps her hand, and feels her fingers, as the different letters are formed; she turns her head a little on one side, like a person listening closely; her lips are apart; she seems scarcely to breathe, and her countenance, at first anxious, gradually changes to a smile, as she comprehends the lesson. She then holds up her tiny fingers, and spells the word in the manual alphabet; next, she takes her types and arranges her letters; and last, to make sure that she is right, she takes the whole of the types composing the word, and places them upon or in contact with the pencil, or whatever the object may be."

The obstacle was overcome: communication was established. Laura Bridgman was a conscious, eager, ardent member of the human family. Nor she alone! for all human beings similarly afflicted, in all ages

that were to come, *the door was open.* From time to time there have been improvements in detail or method, some of them introduced by Dr. Howe himself, others by workers following in his footsteps; it was his hand, and his alone, that opened the door of the Dark Tower.

Mr. E. C. Sanford, in his admirable monograph on *The Writings of Laura Bridgman,* says:

"Laura's first lessons at the Institute are a center of almost romantic interest to the student of her history. Here for the first time was the attempt made to reach and systematically to instruct one so bereft. The spirit of the parties to the experiment was so rare—warm-hearted and scientifically guided benevolence on one side, and real knowledge hunger on the other—the matter at stake was so momentous —no less than a mind's life or death—and the final result was so much what had been desired and worked for, that the whole incident seems less an actual fact than the fancy of a story-teller. In these first lessons the great success was won, the Archimedean fulcrum gained, which made the world of after difficulties relatively light."

Laura's own account of the first lessons must not be omitted.

"The Dr. devised a way of having some words printed on bits of paper, which he glued on a mug and spoon, knife, fork, etc., for me to begin to feel on a single word by my finger. I could not know how to spell one letter with my own fingers for some

time. Dr. H. was my first instructor. Miss Drew was my first instruct[r]ess in her ladyship. I loved them so dearly for a great many excellent reasons. . . . Dr. and Miss Drew set me a most excellent example. I felt so very glad to receive education from them. I enjoyed my new lesson much more than I can say. I never felt weary of studying, as it was very difficult for me to understand such simple and short words."

The following months passed like so many days; on the one side breathless eagerness to learn, on the other hardly less earnest desire to teach. A special teacher, Miss Drew (later Mrs. E. H. Morton) was appointed, whose time was chiefly, if not entirely, devoted to Laura. The task was an absorbing one. The child soon used her fingers as rapidly as others use their lips, their swift twinkling movement became bewildering; it was all Miss Drew could do to follow it. "I shall never forget," she writes, "the first meal taken after she appreciated the use of the finger alphabet. . . . I was obliged to call some one to help me wait upon the other children, while she kept me busy spelling the new words."

We are to think of her at this time as "a dancing shape, an image gay," flitting birdlike through the long corridors and sounding halls of the Institution. Her arms are outstretched, seeking, inquiring; her face is alight with eager interest. Meeting another person, the butterfly fingers, swift and light as air, touch, try, examine, with passion. If it is a child a

quick embrace follows, with who knows what of silent communion denied to "grown-ups"; if a teacher, the butterflies are instantly controlled, and set to work questioning, informing, commenting. The swiftness of her "talk" is a thing to remember, not to describe. One had constantly to remind oneself that this bright, flitting creature could not see one faintest gleam of light; could hear no whisper of sound; that her mind "dwelt in darkness and stillness as profound as that of a closed tomb at midnight." [1]

When Dr. Howe first undertook the charge of the blind, he bandaged his eyes, and went thus about his father's house for many days, that he might guess a little of what it meant to be blind. This was good, and very good; but he did not stop his ears, quick and keen as those of a fox; he did not forbid himself speech, the invisible link between mind and mind. No such links for Laura! Yet she was, in this happiest time of her life, as gay as any creature of wood or field; thrilling, moreover, with that spring of thought and feeling that no woodland creature can ever know. To her a new word or a new thought was like a new toy to an ordinary child. She quivered all over, laughed with pleasure; the tiny fingers repeated it over and over till it was a part of her mental furnishing; she never, I fancy, forgot a word once learned.

Play was as delightful to her as to any other child;

[1] Dr. S. G. Howe, Report.

in recreation hours, when the girls gathered under the grape arbor or ran up and down the long galleries, her step was still in advance, her shrill, merry laugh rang above the others. Yet when she was alone, she seemed no less happy in a quiet way. Sewing, knitting, crocheting, tatting, each homely art was a little new world to explore; she became in time past mistress of all. To see her thread a needle was a little miracle by itself. She raised thread and needle to her lips; one delicate touch with the tip of her tongue, and it was done! Then how swiftly, how unerringly, the fine needle flashed to and fro, setting the tiny, perfect stitches! a sight not to be forgotten.

When no work was at hand, she would talk to herself by the hour together, carrying on imaginary dialogues, one hand with the other; or counting; or spelling out new words. She was as strict with herself as any teacher could be; if the right hand spelled a word wrong, she would instantly strike it with the left, in token of rebuke; when the spelling was perfect, she would laugh and pat herself on the head, as her teacher did. Sometimes she misspelled a word on purpose, and punished herself with a laugh and a roguish look.

Her finger-speech soon became so rapid that it was difficult to follow with the eye. "Butterfly fingers," I have called hers; "hummingbird wings" would better express it. Swift as these motions were, those of *reception* were even swifter. Her hollowed hand hovered over that of her companion, feeling the

letters as they were formed, grasping the meaning of a sentence before it was completed. One must have seen to believe! Small wonder that one teacher after another became exhausted, and had to be relieved.

Six months after she had left home, her mother came to visit her, an interview most touching and pathetic to all who witnessed it. Dr. Howe thus describes it:

"The mother stood some time, gazing with overflowing eyes upon her unfortunate child, who, all unconscious of her presence, was playing about the room. Presently Laura ran against her, and at once began feeling of her hands, examining her dress, and trying to find out if she knew her; but not succeeding in this, she turned away as from a stranger and the poor woman could not conceal the pang she felt, at finding that her beloved child did not know her.

"She then gave Laura a string of beads which she used to wear at home, which were recognized by the child at once, who, with much joy, put them around her neck, and sought me eagerly, to say, she understood the string was from her home.

"The mother now tried to caress her child, but poor Laura repelled her, preferring to be with her acquaintances.

"Another article from home was now given her, and she began to look much interested; she examined the stranger more closely, and gave me to understand that she knew she came from Hanover; she even

endured her caresses, but would leave her with indifference at the slightest signal. The distress of the mother was now painful to behold; for, although she had feared that she should not be recognized, the painful reality of being treated with cold indifference by a darling child, was too much for woman's nature to bear.

"After a while, on the mother taking hold of her again, a vague idea seemed to flit across Laura's mind, that this could not be a stranger: she therefore very eagerly felt of her hands, while her countenance assumed an expression of intense interest; she became very pale, and then suddenly red; hope seemed struggling with doubt and anxiety, and never were contending emotions more strongly depicted upon the human face. At this moment of painful uncertainty, the mother drew her close to her side, and kissed her fondly, when at once the truth flashed upon the child, and all mistrust and anxiety disappeared from her face, as with an expression of exceeding joy she eagerly nestled to the bosom of her parent, and yielded herself to her fond embraces.

"After this the beads were all unheeded; the playthings which were offered to her were utterly disregarded; her playmates, for whom but a moment before she gladly left the stranger, now vainly strove to pull her from her mother; and though she yielded her usual instantaneous obedience to my signal to follow me, it was evidently with painful reluctance. She clung close to me, as if bewildered and fearful;

and when, after a moment, I took her to her mother, she sprang to her arms, and clung to her with eager joy.

"I had watched the whole scene with intense interest, being desirous of learning from it all I could of the workings of her mind; but I now left them to indulge, unobserved, those delicious feelings, which those who have known a mother's love may conceive, but which cannot be expressed.

"The subsequent parting between Laura and her mother, showed alike the affection, the intelligence, and the resolution of the child. . . . Laura accompanied her mother to the door, clinging close to her all the way, until they arrived at the threshold, where she paused and felt around, to ascertain who was near her. Perceiving the matron, of whom she is very fond, she grasped her with one hand, holding on convulsively to her mother with the other, and thus she stood for a moment; then she dropped her mother's hand—put her handkerchief to her eyes, and turning round, clung sobbing to the matron, while her mother departed, with emotions as deep as those of her child."

In 1839 the Institution was moved to South Boston, to the tall, many-balconied building (once the Mt. Washington House), which was to be its home through so many years. Laura was enchanted with the change. The long marble-paved corridors, the rotunda where stood the great globe familiar to generations of childish fingers, the wide, sunny class-

rooms, the assembly hall with its rows of benches and its great organ; she explored them all with wonder and delight. This summer was marked by her learning to write, an exercise in which she took much delight. It was noted that after close application to any study more than thirty minutes, she grew nervous; her study periods were therefore carefully arranged, with rest or play between. She loved play as we have seen; was delighted with the other children at Perkins, and sought them eagerly; but quickly discriminated between those of greater or less intelligence. A dull or unresponsive little girl was usually soon dismissed, often with gestures of contempt; though now and then she enlisted one to wait on her, fetch and carry for her, as the brighter children would not. Mostly, she wanted the bright ones, who could readily learn her finger-language and respond to her constantly-increasing flow of talk. She loved to have her favorites noticed and caressed by teachers and other "grown-ups" *in moderation.* If they were too much praised or petted, she became jealous. She wanted the lion's share of attention; failing of it, she would say, *"My mother will love me!"*

The taste for mimicry soon awoke. She would sit sometimes for an hour, holding a book before her sightless eyes, her lips moving as she had felt other lips to move, in reading aloud. One day (when perhaps there had been sickness in the house) she put her doll to bed, and tended it carefully, as any child

might do, giving it medicine, putting a hot-water bottle to its feet. When "Doctor" came in, she flew to him, insisting that he must see Dolly, feel her pulse, etc.; when he gravely prescribed a blister for the patient's back, she almost screamed with delight.

"Finger-talking" became a passion with the child; a passion that was to fade only with life itself.

Her thirst for information was insatiable; she wanted to know *everything*. Being taken to the stable to see the horses, she asked, "Do horses sit up late?" On being told that horses do not sit up she laughed, and corrected herself. "Do horses stand up late?"

She asks why cows have horns.

"To keep bad cows off when they trouble them."

"Do bad cows know to go away when good cow pushes them?" then after some moments of silent thought: "Why do cows have two horns? to push two cows?"

Pronouns were at first something of a stumbling-block to her. She would say, "Laura, bread, give," or "Water, drink, Laura!" One need not be a blind deaf-mute to experience this difficulty. It was a wholly normal child who said to me once, "Mamma! when Dockor Blank baby drink Dockor Blank baby milk [pause, and reflection] Dockor Blank baby 'tick Dockor Blank baby tongue out!" And her sister, desiring that the black kitten should receive a second saucer of milk, could only say, "Give it another kitty black milk!"

Laura was behind the normal child in time, but not in intelligence. In her eagerness she would often coin words, sometimes with singular effect, but never without thought or what seemed to her reason. For example: Miss Drew spent some time one day in teaching her the meaning of the word "alone." She seemed to understand; being told to go to her room, and return *alone,* she obeyed; but soon after, wishing to go with one of her playmates, she said, "Laura go *al-two!*"

Another taste early developed, and permanently retained, was that for pretty things. A ribbon, a bit of lace, or the like, delighted her as much as if she could see it. A new dress or bonnet was as keen a pleasure to her as to any normal child, and any new article of clothing or ornament must be put on at once and paraded before all beholders. "She became much interested in colors," says Miss Drew, "and took an unaccountable dislike to red."

"What did man make red for?" she asked, and was only reconciled to the unfortunate color by being told that "man" thought it pretty. One can only suppose that the first object which she learned to be *red* was harsh or unpleasing in texture. "She asked if horses were green and blue and pink (knowing that they were not) and laughed heartily at her own question." [2]

Her sense of touch was so delicate as to be almost abnormal; now and then she was able to detect the

[2] *School Journal.*

color of a fabric from the surface which the dye had produced; but any sense whatever of color was of course impossible for her. She announced one day that she would like to have pink eyes and blue hair.

Her love of dress and all that pertained to it was accompanied by an exquisite taste for neatness, cleanliness, order. As child and woman, nothing was more abhorrent to her than untidiness. Her clothes, her room, her bureau drawers, were always spotless, always in "apple-pie order." We shall see later how she required in others as high a standard as her own in these matters.

In spite of occasional fits of temper, such as are common to every active and sensitive child, she was for the most part sunny and cheerful. Tears were rare with her. When she hurt herself, she did not cry, but laughed and jumped about, as if to banish the pain by quick movement. If the pain were too severe for this, she did not seek sympathy or companionship, but tried to get away by herself, as a hurt animal does. Then, in a solitary corner, she would throw herself about violently, as if angry with her hurt body, or vent her spite on some innocent chair or table. "Twice only," Dr. Howe notes, "have tears been drawn from her by the severity of pain; and then she ran away, as if ashamed of crying for an accidental injury." He adds: "But the fountain of her tears is by no means dried up, as is seen when her companions are in pain or her teacher is grieved."

Laura's natural truthfulness, the evidence of a

strong moral sense in her cloistered spirit, gave Dr. Howe heartfelt joy. Of deeply religious nature himself (though, as he said, he "prayed with his hands and feet" oftener than in church), he had from the first watched eagerly for the awakening of the child's spiritual nature. In his own reports and in the journals of her teachers there are countless instances of her innate conscientiousness and integrity. Of her relation to what I may call technical religion I shall speak later; an extract from Miss Drew's journal may here illustrate the fundamental honesty of her nature.

"While Laura was playing with Lydia and Sophia, I told her to go to her room and brush her hair 'very quick,' and come to me. She refused at first. I insisted, and she went up stairs in a pet. In a little while she came into the school-room with Sarah, and looked very anxious. Sarah said that she [Laura] had told the little girls in the parlor that she could not go to school because Miss Drew had gone to Boston, and she [Sarah] came down with her to inquire if I were gone. When Laura took my hand she looked very pale, then red. I asked her what she did. She said, 'I did tell Louisa you were gone to Boston.'

" 'Why did you tell her so?'

" 'Because I was very wrong and did say lie.'

"She then attempted to justify herself, and asked, 'Why did you tell me to go from Sophia?' I told her I wished her to braid her hair.

" 'I didn't want to go.'

"Here the Doctor came in and she colored immediately. He asked her what she had done. She said, 'I did tell lie.'

"After he had left her I talked with her some time and she seemed much grieved, and said, 'I'm sorry. I will be good and will not tell lie any more.' "

"She seems," says Dr. Howe, "to be one of those who have the law graven upon their hearts; who do not see the right intellectually, but perceive it intuitively; who do good not so much from principle as from instinct; and who, if made to swerve a moment from the right by any temptation, soon recover themselves by their native elasticity. For the preservation of the purity of her soul, in her dark and silent pilgrimage through time, God has implanted within her that native love of modesty, thoughtfulness, and conscientiousness, which precept may strengthen but could never have bestowed; and, as at midnight and in the storm the faithful needle points unerring to the Pole, and guides the mariner over the trackless ocean, so will this principle guide her to happiness and to Heaven. May no tempter shake her native faith in this, her guide; may no disturbing force cause it to swerve from its true direction!"

CHAPTER III

COMPANIONS IN SOLITUDE

And here we are reminded of the indirect results of Dr. Howe's work in the education of Laura Bridgman, these being of much greater importance and benefit to the world at large than the mere disenthralment of a single imprisoned mind. Who can measure the effect of the recital of Laura's thrilling story as an example of success in the face of giant difficulties? Told in all the languages of Christendom, it cannot fail to have stimulated the flagging energies of hundreds of those who must ever strive against obstacles and opposition, the inventors and reformers of the world. And to those who neither invent nor reform, but in whose hands is placed the most important and honorable work society can devolve upon any of its members, that of educating the young,—to the teachers of our day and generation, patient and oftentimes weary sowers of seed and toilers in virgin soil,—the story of the blind deaf-mute comes like a breeze from the mountain-top. As they read of barriers broken down, obstacles surmounted, difficulties overcome by the energy, patience, and ingenuity of him in whose honor we are here assembled, their own discouragements sink into insignificance, their hearts and hands are cheered and nerved by that subtle but mighty influence of example, than which no power more potent for good or evil has ever moved mankind.

E. M. GALLAUDET.[1]

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[1] Memorial address in honor of Dr. Howe, 1876.

IN 1841, Laura herself began to keep a diary, filling half a page of foolscap every day with her neat pencil script. It is curious reading.

"*Thursday.* Cynthia gave me twenty cents and hundred cents yesterday. I went in water Friday. . . . Ladies came to see girls Saturday and I bit Sumner because he squeezed my arm yesterday, he was very wrong."

"Sumner" was Charles Sumner, the famous senator and orator; a lifelong friend of Dr. Howe's. A person of austere dignity; I cannot imagine his squeezing anybody's arm! I can see him now, looking down on me from his towering height, and hear his deep voice saying, "How do you do, child?" He was little used to children, and probably felt at a loss to convey to Laura the interest he felt in her; but her dignity equaled his own: anything approaching familiarity, save in her intimates, was always resented by her.

"I taught Lucy [Reed] to say *nut* and *fig* and *cake.* Lucy was good. Doctor cannot walk because he is lame with three legs." (He was using a cane, having received some slight injury.)

Lucy Reed was the second of three blind deaf-mutes brought to the Institution that year (1841).

She was fourteen years old, came from Danby, Vermont, and was wholly untaught, almost uncivilized. Dr. Howe calls her "as nearly unnatural as you can well conceive a human being to be." The training and instruction of Lucy Reed might well have a chapter to itself, and must be described, however briefly.

On first arriving, "she wore over her head a large handkerchief, with the folds of which she covered her face, as with a veil; it hung down as far as her mouth, and completely concealed her features. She had worn this several years, and for the last two years so continually, that her father had seen her face but once during all that time, and then he only caught a glimpse of it. Her parents, humoring her whim, provided for her a number of large handkerchiefs which she changes, as fast as they become soiled, but always in the night, or in a closet by herself."

Her father brought her to the Institution, and with her a younger sister, to whom she clung desperately, refusing to be parted from her; the child was accordingly asked to remain for a time, and stayed several weeks.

After a few days during which Lucy became more or less familiar with her surroundings, Dr. Howe felt that instruction must begin, and led her to a desk in the schoolroom, among the other girls. No persuasion or caresses would induce her to remain in the

seat, and the Doctor reluctantly decided that force must be used. Having her sister close at hand, to show the poor girl that a friend was near, he gently but firmly detained her in the seat from which she would have sprung. Finding that she could not escape, Lucy suddenly darted her nails into his hands, bringing blood at every scratch, and finding this of no avail, flew at his face and eyes with savage fury, and a strength amazing in one so young and slight. Relinquishing his hold for a moment, he put on a wire fencing mask and thick leather gloves, and again endeavored to put the child in her seat. After two hours of frantic struggle on one side and patient force on the other, he succeeded. Twice during the succeeding twenty-four hours she again became violent, but then yielded finally. For some time after this she would obey no one save Dr. Howe, but gradually she came to recognize others, then to submit to their caresses, finally to seek them out. Lessons began, and she received them submissively, obeying but not understanding.

At the end of a month she voluntarily removed the covering from her head, making first, however, a pair of shades for her eyes, such as Laura and some of the other girls wore. The change was made at night. In the morning she came down, revealing a countenance absolutely colorless, like a plant grown in darkness; but with good features and a pleasant expression. She was shy and anxious at first, and

sat in a corner with her face to the wall; but this soon passed, and she smiled and was happy.

Two months went by. Lucy took her daily lessons patiently, but still showed no sign of comprehension. At last the waters stirred, a very little. One day her teacher wrote: "I tried to teach Lucy to spell the word *fig* with her fingers, and succeeded in doing so after much trouble; she would not do it, however, a second time, although she seemed very desirous of having the fig."

Ten days passed with no further sign; then Laura took the matter in hand. She came into the room where Lucy sat passive and patient, bringing some figs. Now Lucy was extremely fond of figs. "Give one to Lucy!" said the teacher. *"No!"* replied Laura. *"Lucy must spell fig before I give it to her!"*

She went to Lucy, and showed her the fig, making her feel of it, but not relinquishing her own hold; then she spelled the word very slowly with her own hand, into Lucy's hollowed hand; then she signed to Lucy to make the letters herself. Lucy refused, and begged for the fig. Laura made her understand that if she would spell the word she should have the fig. It must have been a thrilling scene to watch; the two prisoned spirits at grips, as it were, with each other; the one eager, ardent, striving to break through the wall, the other passively resistant and stubborn. But fire conquers! Laura's was the stronger nature, and she would not be denied; also, Lucy wanted the fig.

She yielded, and made the three signs which for her spelled not only "fig" but "Open sesame!"

Laura was delighted; patted Lucy on head and cheek to show her approval; was infinitely proud of her achievement, as well she might be.

Alas for Lucy Reed! The door was open, but she was not to be allowed to pass beyond the threshold. Just when the experiment was proved successful, her parents decided that they could no longer spare her, and took her away. Great was the sorrow of all at the Institution, but especially of Dr. Howe and Laura. The Doctor and his faithful teachers had labored for five months to bring this poor child into intelligent communication with the human family, and had just succeeded. "Happy should I be," he says, "if all the hours of my life could be devoted to so useful a task as were those in which I was trying to forge the first link in the chain of communication with a human being so thrown without the pale of humanity as poor Lucy Reed."

Her teacher's journal says:

"*July 13.* This was a sad day to us all. Lucy's parents had sent for her to return to them, and all the care and anxiety she had been to her teachers for the five months was forgotten in the sorrow of seeing her leave us. Had she remained we had no doubt of our future success in teaching her, for the greatest difficulties were overcome, but now she must go back from dawn into night again. Laura could think of nothing but Lucy, when she came for her lesson, as

she had just bidden her good-by. She was much troubled that Lucy did not return her embraces. She said, 'I am very sorry; I cannot work much because I am very sorry that Lucy is going away. Why will not Lucy hug me? Will Doctor cry?' Then she reviewed Lucy's history, and not one circumstance connected with her seemed to have escaped her mind. She said, 'Doll will cry; she is very sorry Lucy is gone, and will cry.' "

For several weeks Laura mourned for her mate. "I am very alone," she said, "because Lucy is all gone."

Her teacher asked, "What is 'all gone'?"

She answered, "Lucy will not come back more."

Fortunately it was not long before another object roused her interest and affection. In September of this same year, 1841, Oliver Caswell came from Newport, Rhode Island, a comely child of eight years, deaf, dumb and blind since infancy. There could hardly be a stronger contrast than between Oliver and Lucy. He was a merry, laughing child, pleased with everything, as ready to learn as those around him to teach. On October 1st, Dr. Howe gave him his first lesson. Profiting by previous experience, he omitted several steps of the original process, and began at once with the finger language. Taking several articles with short names, such as *key, cup, mug,* etc., and with Laura for an auxiliary, he sat down, and taking Oliver's hand placed it upon the key, and then with his own hand made the letters

k-e-y. The boy, his interest and curiosity already aroused, was quick to respond though slow to achieve. Laura notes in her journal, "Doctor and Miss Swift taught Oliver to say pen and pin and key and book."

When he finally learned a word, Oliver would laugh heartily, his broad face beaming with pleasure. As for Laura, her delight was so great that on one such occasion she impulsively kissed the boy, a harmless caress which yet troubled her sensitive mind. She came to her teacher (Miss Swift) in distress, and blushed deeply as she spoke of the incident. I cannot help thinking that Miss Swift must have reproved her in the first place; for the poor child asked why it was not as well as for little Maria, the Doctor's niece, to kiss her uncle at bedtime. "After talking about it a long time she came to the conclusion that it would be very wrong. 'Doctor would say I was very wrong and will point at me.' " [2] (N. B. Doctor would in my opinion have done nothing of the sort!)

This is the only instance, I believe, of Laura's making any demonstration of affection toward any one of the other sex, except "Doctor," her second father. I have already spoken of her personal dignity; this was accompanied from the very first by an innate modesty; she was never discovered in any attitude or action at which the most fastidious would revolt. Dr. Howe found it hard to explain the difference of her deportment toward persons of differ-

[2] Miss Swift's journal.

ent sexes. This was observable when she was only seven years old. She was very affectionate, clinging constantly to her girl and woman friends, kissing and caressing them, and even with new acquaintances of her own sex soon becoming familiar, examining their dress freely, receiving their caresses with pleasure; with men, however, it was entirely different; she repelled every approach to familiarity. She was attached indeed to some, and liked to be with them, but she would not sit upon their knees, or allow an arm about her waist. Dr. Howe remarked this in her first years at the Institution, and comments upon it several times in his Reports. Speaking of this native modesty which was so integral a part of Laura's character, he expresses his belief in an "innate tendency to purity which forms an important and beautiful element of humanity;" and looks forward to an ever-growing refinement, "in which, while the animal appetites shall work out their own ends, they shall all of them be stripped of their grossness, and clad in garments of purity, contribute to the perfection of a race made in God's own image."

Laura was (when these words were written) so young, and her physical development so imperfect, that it was impossible to suppose that she had as yet any idea of sex; yet no high-born maiden could be more modest and "proper" in dress or demeanor.

"From the time she came here," writes Dr. Howe, "she has never been accustomed to be in company with any man but myself; and I have, in view of the

future, very carefully refrained from even those endearing caresses which are naturally bestowed upon a child of eight years old, to whom one is tenderly attached. But this will not account for such facts as the following. During the last year, she received from a lady a present of a beautifully dressed doll, with a bed and bedclothes, and chamber furniture of all kinds. Never was a child happier than she was; and a long time passed in examining and admiring the wardrobe and furniture. The wash-stand was arranged, towels were folded, the bureau was put in place, the linen was deposited in the tiny drawers; at last the bed was nicely made, the pillows smoothed, the top sheet turned trimly over, and the bed half opened, as if coquettishly inviting Miss Dolly to come in; but here Laura began to hesitate, and kept coming to my chair to see if I was still in the room, and going away again, laughing, when she found me. At last I went out, and as soon as she perceived the jar of the shutting door, she commenced undressing the doll, and putting it to bed, eagerly desiring her teacher (a lady) to admire the operation.

"She, as I said, is not familiarly acquainted with any man but myself. When she meets with one, she shrinks back coyly; though if it be a lady, she is familiar, and will receive and return caresses; nevertheless, she has no manner of fear or awe of me. She plays with me as she would with a girl. Hardly a day passes without a game at romps between us; yet never, even by inadvertence, does she transgress

the most scrupulous propriety, and would as instinctively and promptly correct any derangement of her dress, as a girl of fourteen, trained to the strictest decorum."

This digression has seemed necessary before continuing the story of Laura's companionship with Oliver. He was as slow in learning as Laura had been quick; but finally, "after long, oft-repeated and patient efforts," he grasped the clew, and was led out of the solitary cell where he had so long dwelt. Laura was intensely interested in his education, and assumed with ardor the part of assistant instructor. Seizing his hand, she would spell into it over and over again, with a patience amazing in one so impatient, the new word or sentence. He submitted patiently, trustingly. But Dr. Howe must describe the scene:

"No scene in a long life has left more vivid and pleasant impressions upon my mind than did that of these two young children of nature helping each other to work their way through the thick wall which cut them off from intelligible and sympathetic relations with all their fellow-creatures. They must have felt as if immured in a dark and silent cell, through chinks in the wall of which they got a few vague and incomprehensible signs of the existence of persons like themselves in form and nature. Would that the picture could be drawn vividly enough to impress the minds of others as strongly and pleasantly as it did my own! I seem now to see the two sitting side by

side at a school desk, with a piece of pasteboard, embossed with tangible signs representing letters, before them and under their hands. I see Laura grasping one of Oliver's stout hands with her long graceful fingers, and guiding his forefinger along the outline; while, with her other hand, she feels the changes in the features of his face, to find whether, by any motion of the lips or expanding smile, he shows any sign of understanding the lesson: while her own handsome and expressive face is turned eagerly toward his; every feature of her countenance absolutely radiant with intense emotions, among which curiosity and hope shine most brightly. Oliver, with his head thrown a little back, shows curiosity amounting to wonder; and his parted lips and relaxing facial muscles express keen pleasure, until they beam with that fun and drollery which always characterize him. . . .

"Three years wrought a strange change and wonderful improvement. They would stand face to face, as if expecting some burst of light to dispel the utter darkness, and enable them to see each other's countenance. They seemed listening attentively for some strange sound to break and dispel the perpetual and deathlike silence in which they had ever lived, and permit them to hear each other's voice. The expression of Laura's face was much more vivid than that of Oliver's; indeed, it was sometimes painful rather than pleasant, owing to the anxiety expressed by her singularly marked and symmetrical features,

which was sometimes so intense as to beget the thought that she might be a wild young witch, or be going mad.

"Oliver, on the other hand, was ever placid, smiling, and frequently overflowing with jollity and fun.

"How changed the scene of their intercourse after four or five years' use of tangible speech had given them a greater range of language, and enabled them to interchange thought and emotions easily and rapidly! Laura, quick as lightning in her perceptions of meaning and in her apt replies, would still almost quiver in her eagerness for greater speed in the flow of her companion's signs. Oliver, patient, passive, reflective, and even smiling, was closely attentive. As the interest increased, Laura would gesticulate with arms and hands, as well as fingers, and dance up and down on the floor excitedly; while Oliver's face, as he grew a little moved, would become flushed, and the perpetual smile on his lips would spread into a broad laugh, which made his pallid face the very image of fun and frolic. No scene on the boards of a pantomimic theatre could exceed this real, living, but silent intercourse between two sorely bereaved but happy youth, who never thought of the impression which they made upon beholders.

"Oliver's case was in some respects more interesting than Laura's, because, although far inferior in mental capacities, and slower in perceptions, he had an uncommonly sweet temper, an affectionate disposition, and a love of sympathy and of fun, the

gratification of which made him happy at heart, and clad his handsome, honest face in perpetual smiles. But Laura, although comely and refined in form and attitude, graceful in motion, and positively handsome in features, and although eager for social intercourse and communion of thought and sentiment with her fellows, had not that truly sympathetic nature which distinguished Oliver. He might, and possibly did, unconsciously love her a little; but she never loved him, nor (as I believe) any man; and never seemed to pine for that closer relation and sympathy with one of the other sex, which ripens so naturally into real and sympathetic love between normal youth, placed in normal circumstances."

Oliver Caswell, from a happy child, grew into a cheerful, contented and useful man. He learned at the Institution not only how to use finger-speech, to read, write, and cipher, but how to make mats, brooms, etc., and through life was able to support himself in part, if not entirely.

Laura made the acquaintance this year of still another blind deaf-mute, Julia Brace, whom she was taken to see at the Hartford School for Deaf-Mutes. There could not have been a more melancholy contrast than between the two bright young creatures described above and the stolid, heavy-faced middle-aged woman to whom little awakening had come beyond the language of signs. It was a pathetic interview. Laura was palpitating with eagerness, her hands outstretched, her face alight with anticipation.

Julia, though made to understand (by placing her fingers on Laura's eyes and ears) that here was another human being afflicted like herself, showed no interest, maintaining an unmoved countenance. Laura threw her arms round her, and put round her neck a chain of her own making. Julia felt of the chain, put it in her pocket, and turned to go, leaving poor Laura in great distress. "Why does she push me? Why does she not love me?" she asked anxiously; it was hard to comfort her, still harder to explain that poor Julia had not learned to love.

A year later Julia Brace visited the Institution, and remained some months under tuition. She overcame the main difficulty, mastering the finger-language; but it was too late. The time of growth, for mind as for body, was past; and after a fair trial, her guardian decided to take her back to the Hartford Asylum which had become home to her. Wholly unresponsive as Julia had been, Laura lamented her departure. "We are all very sad," she writes to a friend, "to have Julia Brace go away to Hartford. I am sad that no one can teach her and be kind to her."

CHAPTER IV

THE JOURNALS

His achievement was a triumph of supreme faith in the inner capacities of the human being. The facts which he gathered from an exploration of a pedagogical field hitherto untried, are of the utmost value to educators, psychologists and men of science.

MICHAEL ANAGNOS.

AS a rule, Laura was fond of the other pupils at Perkins, but she was over inclined to look down on children less bright than herself. To one little girl, Olive ———, she came to have a positive dislike. When Olive first came to school, Laura took her under her special care, showing her about the house, and helping her in various ways. It was only when she tried to teach Olive the finger alphabet that she found the child to be dull and slow-witted. After that, she wished to have nothing to do with her. If anything were broken or lost, she always laid the blame at Olive's door. One day she struck her; and being reproved, showed some slight contrition, but afterward said, "I will go home and come no more."

"Why?" asked the teacher.

"Because I cannot be good in Boston."

"Your mother will be sorry if you are naughty!"

"My mother will love me."

"Yes, but she will be sorry. Are you sorry, Laura, that you came to Boston?"

"No, because I can [could] not talk with fingers, when I came with my father and mother."

"If you go home and come no more, you can talk with no one with fingers."

"My mother will talk *little slow.*"

Indeed, Laura had taught the alphabet to her mother, and Mrs. Bridgman's stiff, toil-worn fingers could shape the letters slowly and with difficulty; a very different matter from Laura's own lightning speed of action, or the skill attained by her teachers and daily companions.

Miss Drew tried to overcome Laura's dislike of Olive; tried to make her understand that Olive was as good as she was.

"You must love Olive, and walk with her, and teach her to talk with fingers."

Laura burst into a loud laugh. "Olive cannot learn to talk with fingers; her fingers are very stiff. She cannot make good letters." And then she made a letter herself, stiffly and awkwardly, to show poor Olive's manner of speaking.

These things being so, it was a grievous matter to her to discover that the despised Olive was in one respect her superior. She had been reading in *The Child's Book* (printed in raised type) about the senses, and afterward asked Miss Drew how many senses she herself possessed.

"You have three!" said Miss Drew gently. Laura was highly displeased. What? Olive (who was merely blind) with more senses than she? She brooded over this in silent indignation. The next day she said earnestly, "I have *four!*"

"Four what?" asked Miss Drew.

"Four senses; think, and nose, and mouth, and fingers."

She was much delighted at this discovery. As has been said, her sense of taste was very defective, and that of smell almost nonexistent. Certain pungent odors and flavors, however, she could detect; that was enough for her. She had as many senses as Olive, and all was well.

"Think" was her own word for mind or spirit. After reciting the multiplication table she would say, "My think is very tired!" One day she did not do as well as usual in her arithmetic lesson, and was rather impatient. When told that her examples were wrong, she was much displeased.

"Ladies do not say wrong. I think you are very wrong to say wrong to me. Think cannot do good, because I am very deaf. Think is very long!" meaning slow in working.

Probably she never came to love arithmetic. The questions, carefully framed to suit normal children, puzzled her. Her instinct was to change the suppositions into facts. "How did the man who wrote that book know I was here?" she asked. A sum was given her: "If you can buy a barrel of cider for four dollars, how much can you buy for one dollar?"

She countered instantly with: "I cannot give much for cider, because it is very sour!"

As Olive (unfortunate child!) roused Laura's angry passions, so Lucy Reed waked all that was most gentle and tender in her nature. These feelings met with little response, alas! Miss Drew notes in her journal:

"Heard a sound from both Lucy and Laura this morning that led me to think all was not right. Found that Laura had accidentally broken the string of Lucy's fan while playing with her, and that Lucy was taking revenge by pinching and striking, while Laura, not understanding about it, still kept her arm round Lucy. This made matters worse; and she had worked herself into quite a passion before I got to her. Separated them, and Lucy grew calm, but Laura was much troubled.

"On coming for her lesson Monday morning, she said, 'I want to talk much with you.' Her first topic was the trouble with Lucy. She had been thinking about it, and could not understand it. 'Why did Lucy pinch and scratch me? Was she very wrong?' Tried to excuse it, saying she did not know better. 'Did she know I was very sorry to break her fan? Why will Lucy pinch and strike?' Told her I hoped she would soon learn it was wrong, and we must be patient with her. This being settled to her satisfaction, she said, 'Why do not heart stop?' Being puzzled for a reply that should not involve me in questions I was not allowed to answer, I said, 'Because it cannot stop.' Told her she always breathed. She held her breath for a while, and said, 'I do not breathe now.' But you will breathe soon, and cannot stop long, or it will hurt you. 'And die,' she added. 'Is not heart very tired?'

"She seems to have a theory of her own regarding the seat of sensation. During a lesson one day she

stopped, and holding her forehead, said, 'I think very hard. Was I baby, did I think?' (meaning, when I was a baby). Another day she said, 'Doctor will come in fourteen days, I think in my head.'

"Asked her if she did not think in her side and heart.

" 'No; I cannot think in heart; I think in head.'

" 'I cannot know; all little girls cannot know about heart.'

"When disappointed or troubled, she often says, 'My heart aches.'

"One day she asked, 'When heart aches, does blood run?' (We had told her about the circulation of the blood.) 'Does blood run in my eyes? I cannot feel eyes blood run. Why cannot I stop to think? I cannot help to think all days. Do you stop to think? (meaning, cease thinking). Does Harrison stop to think, now he is dead?' (President Harrison had lately died, and the blind girls had talked much about it and by them Laura had been told of it.")

One day the tables were turned; Laura pinched Lucy's nose, and made her cry. When Miss Drew spoke to her, at first she smiled and evidently thought it funny to pinch a nose; but on being told that Lucy cried, her countenance changed. "I pinched Lucy's nose to play!" she said eagerly. "I did not mean to make her cry, because I played. Did Lucy know I was wrong?"

"Lucy does not know when you play; you must play softly. Do you love Lucy?"

"Yes, but Lucy does not hug me."

"Why does she not?"

"Because she is very deaf and blind, and does not know how to love me; she is very weak to hug!"

This eventful year of 1842 brought yet another visitor to the Institution: Charles Dickens, then on his first visit to the United States. His impressions of Laura, as recorded in his *American Notes,* have been often quoted, yet no record of her life can omit them. He says:

"The thought occurred to me as I sat down in another room, before a girl blind, deaf, and dumb, destitute of smell, and nearly so of taste; before a fair young creature with every human faculty, and hope, and power of goodness and affection, inclosed within her delicate frame, and but one outward sense —the sense of touch. There she was, before me; built up, as it were, in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light or particle of sound; with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning to some good man for help, that an immortal soul might be awakened.

"Long before I looked upon her the help had come. Her face was radiant with intelligence and pleasure. Her hair, braided by her own hands, was bound about a head whose intellectual capacity and development were beautifully expressed in its graceful outline and its broad, open brow; her dress, arranged by herself, was a pattern of neatness and sim-

plicity; the work she had knitted lay beside her; her writing-book was on the desk she leaned upon. From the mournful ruin of such bereavement there had slowly risen up this gentle, tender, guileless, grateful-hearted being. Like other inmates of that house, she had a green ribbon bound around her eyelids. A doll she had dressed lay near upon the ground. I took it up, and saw that she had made a green fillet such as she wore herself, and fastened it about its mimic eyes.

"I have extracted a few disjointed fragments of her history from an account written by that one man who has made her what she is. It is a very beautiful and touching narrative; and I wish I could present it entire."

Here follow extracts from Dr. Howe's Reports, some of which have already been given. Dickens continues:

"Such are a few fragments from the simple but most interesting and instructive history of Laura Bridgman. The name of her great benefactor and friend who writes it is Dr. Howe. There are not many persons, I hope and believe, who, after reading these passages, can ever hear that name with indifference."

This visit was doubtless made on one of the weekly "Exhibition Days," long a feature of the Institution. Admission was free, and people came in crowds to see the school in general, and Laura Bridg-

man in particular. Finding that they actually pressed about the child in their eager interest, Dr. Howe had a little pen made, where she could sit with her work or book, undisturbed by the throng. It is pleasant to call up the figure of the great novelist, slight, wiry, with breezy whiskers and fly-away-tie, and that of Charles Sumner, massive and austere, towering beside him. Laura was writing in her journal; perhaps, had they glanced over her shoulder, they might have read: "Elephant is very high like wall; ladies do sit on him, on him trunk, to make eat and drink. Dr. bought elephant and horse to show girls; tusk is comb [*i. e.*, comb is made from tusk]. Horse cannot reach elephant. Elephant is very large and far he do live."

The elephant "Doctor" bought was not, as might appear from the entry, a live one; but Laura "saw" live elephants and many other creatures, on a visit to a menagerie, which filled her with delight. She spent four happy hours in feeling of the animals and hearing (the deaf "hear," as the blind "see"!) them described. Her journal tells briefly of the expedition.

"7th day of July thursday morning at seven o'clock i and miss swift and all other folks went to see many animals i gave the elephant very many pieces of apple in his trunk i saw tusks and leg and foot I saw the parrot and leopard and dead giraffe, leopard was very little and very gentle we went to sit on elephants saddle monkeys were wild in cages, so I could not see them any" (that is, could not feel of them).

CHAPTER V

CHANGES

What an encouragement does this story give to the undertaking of good deeds!

JULIA WARD HOWE.

The best record of the great philanthropist's life remains in the new influences which he brought to bear on the community. Traces of these may be found in the improved condition of the several classes of unfortunates whose interests he espoused and vindicated, often to the great indignation of parties less enlightened. He himself had, what he was glad to recognize in Wendell Phillips, a prophetic quality of mind. His sanguine temperament, his knowledge of principles and reliance upon them, combined to lead him in advance of his own time. Experts in reforms and in charities acknowledge the indebtedness of both to his unremitting labors. What the general public should most prize and hold fast is the conviction, so clearly expressed by him, that humanity has a claim to be honored and aided, even where its traits appear most abnormal and degraded. He demanded for the blind an education which would render them self-supporting; for the idiot, the training of his poor and maimed capabilities; for the insane and the criminal, the watchful and redemptive tutelage of society. In the world as he would have had it, there would have been neither paupers nor outcasts. He did all that one man could do to advance the coming of this millennial consummation.

IBID.

WITH the year 1843 came a great change in Laura's life. Dr. Howe became engaged to, and married, Julia Ward, daughter of the late Samuel Ward, of New York.

Laura may almost be said to have—all unconsciously—brought about this marriage. It was specially to see her that one day, in the summer of 1841, Julia Ward and her sisters, who were staying near Boston, drove over to South Boston, in company with Charles Sumner and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, to see for themselves "the face into which Dr. Howe had so recently brought the light of intellectual life." She has herself told how, "while we were intently engaged in observing Laura's characteristic gestures, Mr. Longfellow, who stood near a window, exclaimed: 'Here comes Howe on his black charger!' and presently the *preux chevalier* of modern philanthropy was brought to welcome us, with his shy, but not ungracious greeting." [1]

The news of "Doctor's" engagement was a severe shock to Laura. Ever since she left her home six years before, she had been the prime object of his affection. He loved all his blind pupils, watched over them with tender interest, gave his time, his thought,

[1] Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences.*

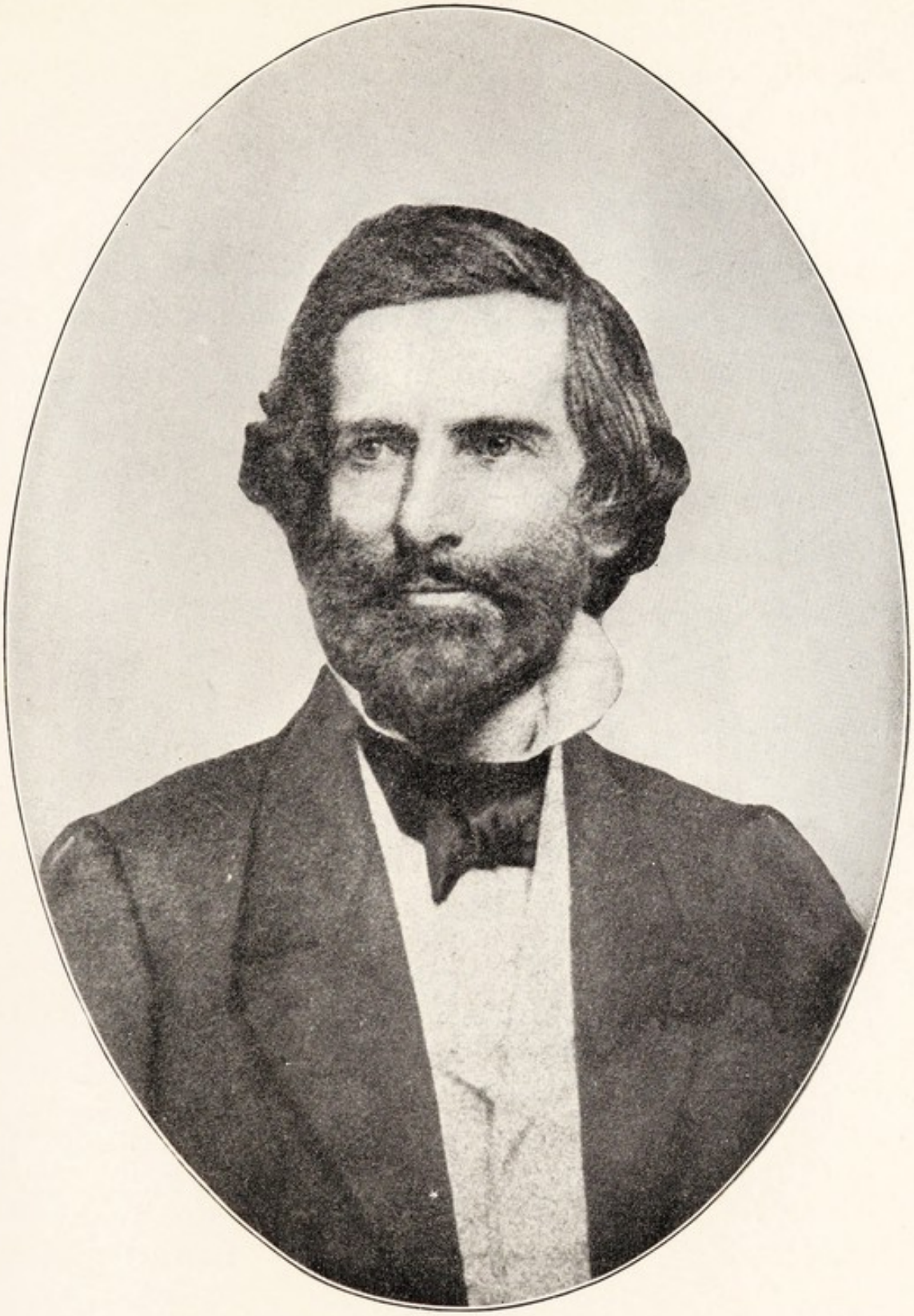
his effort, to every case, without stint; but Laura, as he often said, was like his own child to him. Much of the time she had lived with him and his sister in the "Doctor's Part" of the Institution. He never entered a room without her being instantly conscious of his presence, however softly he might tread. I have seen him come into one of the large classrooms and stand motionless by the door, looking toward Laura, where she sat with her work. "Doc! Doc!" she exclaimed instantly, and rose in great excitement to greet him. (I shall speak later of her "noises," as she called them.)

When he was away from home, she counted the days, or "schools" (her own phrase), till his return. Even when on a visit to her old home, she talked continually of him.

"I think much about Doctor, I want to see him. I cannot wait till he comes. I am in hurry till Doctor come. Why did he go? Does he know I want to see him very much? I think Doctor does not love me to go away. I must write letter to him."

On being asked what she would write, she said: "I shall write that he must come to see me quick. I think much about him at all times."

"Doctor" was the supreme power in her world; all things were subject to his approval. When a delegation from the Massachusetts House of Representatives came to visit the school, she asked them if they brought their rules to "Doctor" to see if they were



S. G. Howes

right. When she was stubborn or disobedient, her teachers, one and all, found that the infallible remedy was "Doctor would not like!"

And now, she was no longer to be first in her adopted father's heart and mind. Some one else was coming to share her life with him; some one named Julia, who came from far, who was beautiful; who could see and hear, and "talk with mouth." Small wonder that jealousy woke in the fiercely-loving little heart.

The marvel is that the child, in the lonely deeps of that heart, fought her good fight and conquered.

Nowhere, in letters or journals, is there any hint of bitterness.

"Does Doctor love me like Julia?" she asked her teacher anxiously.

"No!" said Miss Swift.

"Does he love God like Julia?"

"Yes!"

She repeated the question later, adding, "God was kind to give him his wife."

There was no outcry, no passionate lamentation: lessons went on as usual, and she was outwardly calm and attentive, but her mind dwelt constantly on the forthcoming separation. She longed to go to the wedding, but when told that the journey was too long and fatiguing for her, she submitted without protest, though she continued to talk about it.

"I wanted to go to see Doctor wedding. Do ladies wear very nice dresses? Did Doctor wear very nice?

When you are married I shall come to your wedding, and wear very nice silk," then changed her sentence, saying, "I meant *if*."

"I love Doctor, like Mrs. Howe. I love him very, very much; is he my daughter? He said he was."

"I think he said you were his daughter, did he not?

"Is Mrs. Howe my sister?"

"If Doctor is your father, then she will be your mother."

"No; J.[2] is mother. I cannot love Mrs. Howe as I do J., because I do not see her often; she is a stranger."

She was taken to visit the steamship in which the bridal pair were to sail, and examined everything with meticulous care. After seeing the crockery in the saloon: "I have seen cups and saucers and plates; where are spoons and knives and forks? Will you show me where men keep the flour and molasses?" (Bread and molasses was her favorite dish!) Next she must see the galley, and was amazed to find the chef a man.

"Can men make things good?"

The chef, informed of this question, answered in kind with a cake; this roused new curiosity.

"Where did men get milk to make cake?" She was shown the cow; finally, she must walk the whole length of the ship, to know how much room Doctor would have.

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[2] Miss Jeannette Howe, afterward Mrs. Thomas B. Wales.

When the day of sailing came, she was much excited, yet tried hard to conceal her emotion from others.

"Do not be very sad!" she said to her teacher; "I will make you happy."

Miss Swift brought Oliver into the room, thinking it would amuse and cheer Laura to talk with him. She said, "I will try very hard to make him happy. He must not be sad!"

She led Oliver through the empty rooms, showing him where the trunks, etc., had been. They talked much together; she grew quieter, and took up her normal occupations with little outward expression of grief. That it lay still close at her heart is shown in a letter to a blind friend. All through the letter, amid affectionate inquiries and items of Institution news, runs the thread of sorrowful memory.

"Doctor went to New York to see Miss Ward many times because he loved her very much. Last Saturday morning he went to New York to be married Wednesday evening. Miss Ward is married,—Mrs. Howe. Miss J. went to see Dr. married Wednesday evening. Mrs. H. came with her husband to stay till Monday. Before dinner they are going in ship to stay two weeks. I went to see ship Friday, where [in which] Dr. is going away . . . I am very sad to have Dr. and Mrs. Howe go and stay many months, one year. They will go three thousand miles, far off. . . . Mrs. Howe can talk with her fingers, she goes away in May. . . . Dr. and Mrs.

Howe went away in the ship Monday. They will come next spring, very long. . . ."

Even in the arithmetic lesson, which was her daily cross, the thought follows her.

"Why," she asked, "does man put sums in book for girls to guess?" After studying some time on one she said, "I am not very widsom. What does widsom mean? To know much, like Doctor?"

She was taught the noun "wisdom" and the adjective "wise," and encouraged by being told that "Doctor" had to study such sums when he was a little boy, to make him very wise.

Laura became warmly attached to Mrs. Howe. Even before seeing her, she wrote to husband and wife together as follows:

"My very dear Dr. and Mrs. Howe,—I want to see you very very much. I pity you not to see you for a year. Miss J. was very sick three days Sunday and Monday and Tuesday. Now she is very well and strong. One bird is blind now and he does not know the way in the cage but he tries to find some seeds or water to eat and drink it. Mr. Fisher painted on a cloth like my face and Oliver's face too for you to keep in new house. I send much love to you. I am well and strong. I love you best.

"My best friends, Good bye."

The "painted cloth" was the portrait of Laura and Oliver, familiar to all who know Perkins. The girl

holds the boy's hand and guides it over the book. Though not a great work of art, it is a speaking likeness of both children, and has an attraction all its own.

When Dr. and Mrs. Howe returned from Europe, Laura continued for a time to live with them in the "Doctor's Part"; when they moved to their own home, "Green Peace," it was judged best for her to remain at the Institution, which was henceforward and through life her real home.

The first of the "Howe children," Julia Romana, was born in Rome, March 12, 1844, and from the hour of her birth was an object of the deepest interest to Laura. When she first heard of the child's birth, "she was almost beside herself," notes Miss Swift, "and did not know what to do but hug and kiss me."

She wrote to the young mother in Rome:

"I love your baby very much, & am your precious. [She is my precious.] I shall make a present for you to remember me many years. I should like to live with you and your husband & dear baby. While you were away one year I was in great misery, & had to miss you many times. I did not like to have you go away with Dr. Howe. As soon as you come home, I shall run to you & kiss & hug you very hard, & shall take my very dear baby & kiss it very softly & take off her things. I shall always set her a good example. I want to see her very much. I should like to make a very nice clothes to help you. . . . I

want you to come back now; if you do not come quick, then I must send a long string to pull you over the sea to South Boston. I thought of you & Julia & Doctor many times, that they would love me very much, because I love them & you so much. . . . Please to kiss the baby for me many times a day, every day."

When the travelers returned, her greatest joy was to hold the baby, and hang over it, exploring its dimples and rejoicing in its lovely curves and softnesses.

In due time the child Julia came to return Laura's affection and interest, and a beautiful relation grew up between the two. Indeed, Julia was the only one of us who attained real intimacy with Laura, even as she was the one who took active part and share in my father's work among the blind. Later, as the wife of Michael Anagnos, she continued her lovely ministry among them, until her death in 1884. Her last words on earth, "Take care of the little blind children!" are graven on the walls of the kindergarten which is the enduring monument of her and her husband.

CHAPTER VI

THINGS SPIRITUAL

I am aware of the high responsibility to God, and that love which I bear to the child forces me, after seeking for all light from others, finally to rely upon my own judgment. It is not to be doubted that she could be taught any dogma or creed, and made to give as edifying answers as are recorded of many other wonderful children, to questions on spiritual subjects. But as I can see no necessary connection between moral and religious life and the intellectual perception of a particular truth, or belief in a particular creed, I see not why I should anticipate what seems to me the course of nature in developing the mental powers. Unaided by any precedent for this case, one can look only to the book of nature; and that seems to teach that we should prepare the soul for loving and worshipping God, by developing its powers, and making it acquainted with his wonderful and benevolent works, before we lay down rules of blind obedience.

S. G. Howe.

CAREFULLY and tenderly as my father (for it is by this dear name that I shall henceforth call Dr. Howe) watched and noted every phase in Laura's development, physical, mental and spiritual, it was the last-named that claimed and received his deepest thought and care. The devoted teachers could and did keep note of her daily sayings and doings; could foster every good and lovely impulse, and check every selfish or unruly one. Too much praise cannot be given to these faithful and admirable women. But in matters spiritual, my father felt that he alone was responsible. He had waked the sleeping soul; his must be the task of guiding it on its solitary way. The intensity of his feelings on this subject, the anguish of solicitude, the passion of aspiration, shine through the grave, restrained language of the Reports like flame through alabaster.

Above all, he dreaded lest the "instinct within us which reaches and towers," be hampered or warped by trammels of sectarian prejudice. Here, if ever, he felt, the prisoned spirit might, *should* rise unhindered toward the Divine whose breath it was.

In the Ninth Report, after speaking of Laura's insatiable thirst for knowledge, her continued gladness, her keen enjoyment of life, her expansive love, her

unhesitating confidence, her sympathy with suffering, her conscientiousness, truthfulness, hopefulness, he adds that no technically religious feeling has yet appeared; it is hardly time, he thinks, to expect it; but the child has learned to feel respect for persons in authority, to love those in whom she finds tenderness and affection; in time, when she has learned something of cause and effect, then, he prays, "may her veneration be turned to Him who is almighty, her respect to Him who is omniscient, and her love to Him who is all goodness and love!"

He adds: "Until then, I shall not deem it wise, by premature effort, to incur the risk of giving her ideas of God which would be alike unworthy of His character and fatal to her peace. I should fear that she might personify Him in a way too common with children, who clothe Him with unworthy, and sometimes grotesque attributes, which their subsequently developed reason condemns but strives in vain to correct."

Laura began about this time (in her thirteenth year) to be extremely inquisitive about the origin of things. She knew that men made houses and chairs; but who made horses and sheep? *Who made men?*

"God!" was the answer.

The word was familiar to her; had drifted into her vocabulary, probably very early, making a decided but vague impression. A house was building near by,

and her teacher explained the process. Laura was puzzled.

"How do masons pile up bricks before floor is made to stand on?"

This being made clear to her: "When did masons make Jennette's parlor? Before all Gods make all folks?"

Again: "How large is heaven?" "Is there a door to heaven?" "How does the sky look?" "What is it made of?" "Is heaven made of iron?" Many of her questions about God are of the same sort: "Can God be at sun?" "Can He walk and run to the sun?" "Is God ever surprised?"

In Laura's own diary she occasionally refers to religious subjects in her own quaint language.

"*3rd. Jan.* i thought about heaven and God that he would invite me sometime when he is ready for us to go to him. he made it storm very much. . . ."

19th. February, 1844. i thought about heaven and god that I am his very best friend i loved him very very much and he loved much and best."

Speaking of Laura's thoughts on spiritual subjects, my father thus describes an incident in the life of the Institution, and its effect upon Laura:

"During the past year one of our pupils died, after a severe illness, which caused much anxiety in our household. Laura, of course, knew of it, and her inquiries after him were as frequent and as correct as those of any one. After his death, I proceeded to break it to her. I asked her if she knew that little

Orin was very sick. She said 'yes.' 'He was very ill yesterday forenoon,' said I, 'and I knew he could not live long.' At this she looked much distressed, and seemed to ponder upon it deeply. I paused awhile, and then told her that 'Orin died last night.' At the word *died,* she seemed to shrink within herself,—there was a contraction of the hands,—a half spasm, and her countenance indicated not exactly grief, but rather pain and amazement; her lips quivered, and then she seemed about to cry, but restrained her tears. She had known something of death before; she had lost friends, and she knew about dead animals, but this was the only case which had occurred in the house. She asked about death, and I said, 'When you are asleep does your body feel?'

" 'No if I am very asleep.'

" 'Why?' 'I do not know.'

"I tried to explain, and used the word *soul.* She said 'What is soul?'

" 'That which thinks, and feels, and hopes, and loves,' said I, to which she added interrogatively, 'and aches?'

"Here I was perplexed at the threshold by her inquiring spirit seizing upon and confounding material and immaterial processes. I tried to explain to her that an injury of the body was perceived *by* the soul; but I was clearly beyond her depth, although she was all eagerness to go on. I think I made her comprehend the difference between material and spiritual operations. After a while she asked, 'Where is

Orin's think?' 'It has left his body and gone away.' 'Where?' 'To God in Heaven.' She replied, 'Where? up?' (pointing up.) 'Yes!" 'Will it come back?' 'No!' 'Why?' said she. 'Because his body was very sick and died, and soul cannot stay in dead body.'

"Soon she said, 'Can God see, has He eyes?'

"I replied by asking her, 'Can you see your mother in Hanover?'

" 'No!'

" 'But,' said I, 'you can see her with your mind, you can think about her and love her.'

" 'Yes,' said she; 'so,' replied I, 'God can see you and all people and know all they do; and He thinks about them and loves them, and He will love you and all people if they are gentle and kind and good, and love one another.'

" 'Can He be angry?' said she; 'No! He can be sorry, because He loves all folks, and grieves when they do wrong.' 'Can He cry?' said she. 'No! the body cries because the soul is sad, but God has no body.'

"I then tried to make her think of her spiritual existence as separate from her bodily one; but she seemed to dislike to do so, and said eagerly, 'I shall not die;' some would have said she referred to her soul, but she did not, she was shrinking at the thought of physical death, and I turned the conversation. I could not have the heart to give the poor child the baneful knowledge before I prepared the antidote.

It seems to me that she needs not the fear of death to keep her in the path of goodness."

My father planned to give her first some idea of immaterial power, through the attraction of magnets, the growth of vegetation, etc.; and so lead up gradually to that Power which taught the iron to stir and the leaf to push; but this was not to be.

Her teachers were strictly charged to refer all Laura's questionings on spiritual matters to my father, and there are many evidences of their faithful endeavors to comply with the difficult charge. Her mother, though filled with a burning desire for the "conversion" (to the Baptist faith) of her afflicted child, was yet too sensible of all my father had done for that child to oppose his will directly. When he sailed for Europe with his bride in May, 1843, it was with cheerful confidence that on his return he would be able to continue his course of leading the child of his spirit, through paths which could be made clear and smooth to her, onward and upward.

During the year of his absence, he felt that her mind was becoming disturbed. In the winter of 1844 she wrote to him:

"My very Dear Dr. Howe:

"What can I first say to God when I am wrong? Would he send me good thoughts & forgive me when I am very sad for doing wrong? Why does he not love wrong people, if they love Him? Would he be very happy to have me think of Him & Heaven very

often? Do you remember that you said I must think of God & Heaven? I want you to please to answer me to please me. I have learned about great many things to please you very much. Mrs. Harrington has got new little baby eight days last Saturday. God was very generous & kind to give babies to many people. Miss Rogers' mother has got baby two months ago. I want to see you very much. I send much love to you. Is God ever ashamed? I think of God very often to love Him. Why did you say that I must think of God? You must answer me all about it, if you do not I shall be sad. Shall we know what to ask God to do? When will He let us go to see Him in Heaven? How did God tell people that he lived in Heaven? How could He take care of folks in Heaven? Why is He our Father? When can He let us go in Heaven? Why cannot He let wrong people to go to live with Him & be happy? Why should He not like to have us ask Him to send us good thoughts if we are not very sad for doing wrong?"

He replied as follows:

"My dear little Laura:

"Mrs. Howe has a sweet little baby; it is a little girl. We shall call her Julia. She is very smooth and soft and nice; she does not cry much, and we love her very, very much. You love her too, I think, do you not? But you never felt of her and she never

kissed you; how can you love her? It is not your hands, nor your body, nor your head, which loves her and loves me, but your soul. If your hands were to be cut off, you would love me the same; so it is not the body which loves. Nobody knows what the soul is, but we know that it is not the body, and cannot be hurt like the body; and when the body dies the soul cannot die. You ask me in your letter a great many things about the soul, and about God; but, my dear little girl, it would take very much time and very many sheets of paper to tell you all I think about it, and I am very busy with taking care of my dear wife; but I shall try to tell you a little, and you must wait until I come home in June, and we will talk very much about all these things. You have been angry a few times and you have known others to be angry, and you know what I mean by anger; you love me and many friends, and you know what I mean by love. When I say there is a spirit of love in the world, I mean that good people love each other; but you cannot feel the spirit of love with your fingers; it has no shape or body; it is not in one place more than another; yet wherever there are good people there is a spirit of love. God is a spirit; the spirit of love. If you go into a house and the children tell you that their father whips them; if the house is cold and dirty, and everybody is sad and frightened because the father is bad and angry and cruel, you will know the father has no spirit of love. You never felt of him, you never had him strike you, you

do not know what man he is, and yet you know that he has not the spirit of love,—that is, he is not a good, kind father. If you go into another house, and the children are all warm and well fed and well taught, and are very happy, and everybody tells you that the father did all this and made them happy, then you know he has the spirit of love. You never saw him, and yet you know certainly that he is good; and you may say that the spirit of love reigns in the house. Now my dear child, I go all about in this great world, and I see it filled with beautiful things; and there are a great many millions of people; and there is food for them, and fire for them, and clothes for them; and they can be happy if they have a mind to be and if they love each other. All this world, and all these people, and all the animals, and all things were made by God. He is not a man nor like a man; I cannot see Him or feel Him, any more than you saw and felt the good father of that family; but I know that He has the spirit of love, because He too provided everything to make all the people happy. God wants everybody to be happy all the time,—every day, Sundays and all, and to love one another; and if they love one another they will be happy; and when their bodies die, their souls will live on and be happy, and then they will know more about God.

"The good father of the family I spoke to you about let his children do as they wished to do, because he loved to have them free; but he let them know that

he wished them to love each other and to do good; and if they obeyed his will they were happy; but if they did not love each other, or if they did any wrong, they were unhappy; and if one child did wrong it made the others unhappy too. So in the great world; God left men and women and children to do as they wish, and let them know that if they love one another and do good, they will be happy; but if they do wrong they will be unhappy, and make others unhappy likewise.

"I will try to tell you why people have pain sometimes, and are sick and die; but I cannot take so much time and paper now. But you must be sure that God loves you, and loves everybody, and wants you and everybody to be happy; and if you love everybody, and do them all the good you can, and try to make them happy, you will be very happy yourself, and will be much happier after your body dies than you are now.

"Dear little Laura, I love you very much. I want you to be happy and good. I want you to know many things; but you must be patient, and learn easy things first and hard ones afterwards. When you were a little baby you could not walk, and you learned first to creep on your hands and knees, and then to walk a little, and by and by you grew strong. Your mind is young and weak and cannot understand hard things; but by and by it will be stronger, and you will be able to understand hard things; and I and my wife will help Miss Swift to show you all about

things that now you do not know. Be patient then, dear Laura; be obedient to your teacher, and to those older than you; love everybody, and do not be afraid.

"Good-bye. I shall come soon, and we will talk and be happy.

"Your true friend,

"DOCTOR."

My father's hopes in this matter were not to be realized. During his absence in Europe some of those immediately associated with Laura felt it their duty to instruct her in "revealed religion," and when my father returned he found her mind filled with Calvinistic doctrine. This was one of the great disappointments of his life.

He says sadly enough:

"I did not long hold the only key to her mind; it would have been unkind and unjust to prevent her using her power of language as fast as she acquired it, in conversation with others, merely to carry out a theory of my own, and she was left to free communication with many persons even before my necessary separation from her of more than a year.

"During my absence, and perhaps before, some persons more zealous than discreet, and more desirous to make a proselyte than to keep conscientiously their implied promise of not touching upon religious topics,—some such persons talked to her of the Atonement, of the Redeemer, the Lamb of God, and of some very mystical points of mere

speculative doctrine. These things were perhaps not farther beyond her comprehension than they were beyond the comprehension of those persons who assumed to talk to her about them; but they perplexed and troubled her, because, unlike such persons, she wished that every word should be the symbol of some clear and definite idea.

"She could not understand metaphorical language; hence the Lamb of God was to her a *bona fide* animal, and she could not conceive why it should continue so long a lamb, and not grow old like others and be called a sheep.

"I must be supposed to mention this only as her faithful chronicler, and to do it also in sorrow. If the poor child spoke inadvertently on such topics, it was without consciousness of it, and she was made to do so by indiscreet persons, not by any communications of mine or of her teacher; we shall never speak to her of Jesus Christ but in such a way as to impart a portion at least of our own reverence, gratitude and love."

As has been said, Laura's teachers, one and all, were earnestly adjured to make no direct answer to any questions from Laura about spiritual matters, but to refer her at once to Dr. Howe. For the most part, the teachers carried out his wishes faithfully. He does not give the names of the "persons more zealous than discreet," and it is best so. They did what they thought their duty. Her mother wished from the first that she should join the Baptist church.

Some years later, while on a visit to her home, she came under influences which moved her deeply in this direction. Her spirit, which had heretofore worshiped its Creator in the joy of perfect freedom, seeking the Divine as naturally as a flower seeks the sun, was now forced into the mold of sectarian dogma. My father had taught her to love God, simply and happily; she now learned to fear Him. She experienced "conversion," and was received into the Baptist communion, of which she remained through life a devout member. This was during the Civil War. My father was much occupied with the Sanitary Commission (forerunner of the Red Cross), of which he was one of the founders. He returned to find his beloved pupil greatly changed; he could hardly recognize, in the conventional and rigid sectarian, the girl whose clearness and simplicity of mind had so delighted him but a few months before. As the instruction of Laura was one of the great joys of his life, so was this lapse, as it seemed to him, into spiritual bondage one of the great sorrows.

During a period of about ten years, Laura's mind remained in a kind of pietistic rigor, which gave my father much pain, though there was no change in the affectionate relation between them. Gradually she emerged from this condition, and though always finding great comfort and happiness in her chosen communion, recovered her natural cheerfulness and gayety.

It was during this period that she wrote the three so-called "poems," which created much interest at the time. The best-known is:

HOLY HOME

Heaven is holy home.
Holy home is from ever
Lasting to everlasting.
Holy home is Summery.
Holy home shall endure
forever.

But earthly home shall
perish.
I pass a dark home to-
ward a light home above.
Hard it is for us to
appreciate the beauty
of holy home because
of blindness of our
minds.

But by the finger of God
my eyes & my ears
shall be opened.
The string of my
tongue will be loosed.
With sweeter joy in
holy home I shall

see & speak & hear.
What rapturous joy
I shall hear Angels
sing & play on instruments.

In holy home music
is sweeter than honey.
& finer than fine gold.
How glorious holy
home is & still more
than a sunbeam.
When I die. I shall
behold the radiance
of Heaven's blest
mansions.

God will make me
happy when I die.
Jesus Christ has
gone to prepare a
place for those who
love him.
My hope is for that
sinners might turn
themselves from the
power of darkness
to light divine.

The second, composed for "my beloved Sister Julia," [1] is in the same vein of fervent piety. The

[1] Probably Julia Howe.

third is by far the best of the three; a poignant utterance which wrings the heart; a cry from the prisoned soul, picturing the light she can never know, the darkness which is her lifelong companion.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Light represents day.
Light is more brilliant than ruby, even diamond.
Light is whiter than snow.
Darkness is night like.
It looks as black as iron.
Darkness is a sorrow.
Joy is a thrilling rapture.
Light yields a shooting joy through the human [*heart*].
Light is sweet as honey, but
Darkness is bitter as salt and even vinegar.
Light is finer than gold and even finest gold.
Joy is a real light.
Joy is a blazing flame.
Darkness is frosty.
A good sleep is a white curtain.
A bad sleep is a black curtain.

CHAPTER VII

"ASKING, ALWAYS ASKING!"

In Dr. Howe the cause of articulation in America had one of its earliest and warmest supporters. It is probably not surpassing the truth to say that, in the absence of his efforts in this direction, the happy results now witnessed at Northampton and in this city would have been postponed, perhaps for many years.

EDWARD M. GALLAUDET.

LAURA'S special teachers were four in number: Miss Drew (Mrs. Morton), Miss Swift (Mrs. Lamson), Miss Rogers, and Miss Wight (Mrs. Bond). Through successive periods, these devoted women gave most of their time and strength to Laura, teaching, talking, ministering. It was a most exhausting vocation. The mind so strangely imprisoned was one of ardent energy, of unbounded and burning curiosity. When not reading or at work, Laura must be talking; in these days of her girlhood, chiefly *asking*. Her fingers flew with a rapidity which must have been seen to be imagined; the teacher toiled after as best she might.

"Do horses draw good when they are small like me?" "No." "When they are large like doctor? Why do horses love to have men pat them? Do horses think? When I went to get water, dog came to the door."

"Was he glad to see you?"

"I did not ask him because he is very dull, because he cannot talk with his fingers."

"Can he talk with his mouth?"

"No."

"What does the dog do with mouth?"

She made a noise, as she supposed, like barking.

"Do horses bark? Do dogs bark to ask men for meat for them to eat, and when they are cross, and when they are afraid? Do men talk to dogs when they are cross?"

"Yes, they say, 'Be still!' "

"With mouth?"

She was quite indignant that dogs should hear when men spoke with their mouths, while she could not.

"Do men bark? Do mouse bark?"

All her teachers kept journals, and one of them, Miss Swift (Mrs. Lamson), published in 1878 a volume entitled, *The Life and Education of Laura Bridgman.* Miss Swift was Laura's special teacher from 1841 to 1846. Her book, published thirty years later, contains, naturally enough, some inaccuracies, but it is necessary to a student of Laura's life. Miss Drew's and Miss Wight's notes are no less valuable; one and all testify to the untiring devotion of these young women.

Miss Drew writes:

"*August 9, 1841.* She said, 'It rains.'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Why does it rain?'

" 'Rain comes from clouds; clouds are full of water and it falls on the ground.'

" 'Wrong?'

" 'No.'

" 'God is very full.'

" 'Who told you about God?'

" 'No one; I think about God.' . . .

"*September 13th.* She said impatiently, 'Why does rain come?'

" 'To make corn and beans and potatoes and all things grow.'

" 'It does not make me grow.' . . .

"*September 22.* Held a conversation with Laura this morning about the word *blame.*

" 'What is blame?' [The teacher asks.]

" 'Blame is to strike.'

" 'No. When you are not pleasant I blame you because you know it is wrong, and I think you are wrong, but I do not strike you.'

" 'I blame to strike?'

" 'Yes, you are to blame. I blame you because you know it is wrong to strike, and all boys and girls are to blame when they do wrong, because they know it is wrong.'

" 'Little girl took apples.'

" 'Where were apples?'

" 'In street, was she wrong?'

" 'Yes. Why did she take apples?'

" 'Because she was hungry.'

" 'You eat when you are hungry, is it wrong?'

" 'When folks give me.'

" 'Why do little girls do not get grapes in yard?'

" 'Because they are not little girls' grapes.'

" 'Would it be right for little girls to get grapes when doctor and all folks did not know?'

"'*No, it would be very wrong.*'

"'You can get grapes and doctor will not know: would it be right?'

"'*No!*'

"'What is it to take things when folks do not know?'

"'Wrong.'

"'It is to steal.'

"'What is steal?'

"'To take things that are not yours.'

"'What would Doctor do if I took grapes?'

"'He would be very sorry, and cry, and say you were wrong to steal. Do you think good girls steal?'

"'*No!*'

"'What girls steal?'

"'Bad. Would blood come in face if I steal?'

"'Yes.'"

Ah! the grapes! The Institution formed three sides of a square, and over the open space, the "yard," as it was called, was a trellis—we should call it a pergola to-day—covered with grapevines. The grapes were old-fashioned "Isabellas;" but their bloom and perfume could not have been surpassed—it seems in retrospect—by Black Hamburg or Alexandria Muscat.

Miss Swift writes:

"*February 9.* Asked if she had any 'new words' for me. In reply she said, 'Doctor told me about God; it was very little say, and he told me when I was very tall he would teach me about God much.

Is it man? Did it make you and me?' Told her she must ask Doctor again about it. . . .

"*February 25.* In the midst of a conversation upon everyday occurrences she said abruptly, 'I want to see God. I want Doctor to make me see.' Speaking of being tall, asked her if she wished to be tall. 'Yes, because I want to learn about many Gods, and to wear collar.' It will be perceived that thus far she had only a vague idea of God, but that her desire to be taught about Him was very great."

In reading or studying, a new word was instantly brought to the teacher for explanation. Once when a long list had been explained, "My head aches," said the poor child, "to think of many words; do sheep's head ache?" Animals interested her greatly, especially in their points of resemblance to men.

"The dog Marco accompanied us in our walk to-day, and she was much interested in asking the extent of his knowledge. 'Can Marco hear when you say Marco?' Told her yes, and that he came to me. 'Does he know Doctor?' 'Yes.' 'Will you say Doctor to him, and see if he knows?' Told her he did not know when I talked about Doctor, but when he saw him he knew him. This was a great puzzle to her, that he should know his own name and not Doctor's, and after thinking of it for some time she said quite impatiently, 'I will ask Doctor, you do not know.' "

A horse belonging to the Institution was sick, and she was much troubled.

"Laura's mind has been entirely occupied with the sick horse. She wants to know if he has medicine. 'Does he know sick or better?' Told her he did not know the words, sick or better, but he knew when he felt better. She asks every hour what they are doing for him, and if they give him gruel. When told no, she said I was wrong, that horses ate meal and water and that was gruel, which I did not dispute. To-day she had been told he was dead. 'Why did not I die when I was very sick?' This is the first time she has alluded to her own death in conversation with me, and now she looked anxious and much troubled. 'Did horse know about dead, before he was dead?' "

One morning Laura was found standing by a table with a book before her, talking rapidly to herself, her brow clouded, her mind evidently much disturbed. A glance at the book showed that it was *Viri Romae* in raised type. This was her first encounter with a foreign language. Perceiving some one near, she turned instantly and said, "Bad book! bad book!" As usual, however, she received the explanation with eager interest, and was satisfied with the fact that in different countries, men used various languages. "Does Doctor know Latin, and Jennette, Rogers and Sophie?" When told that many people had no knowledge of the language, she was content; but soon asked, "Does God know Latin? Do you know all things like God?"

"Asking, always asking;" the eager hands out-

stretched, the eager face uplifted; this was Laura's attitude through all the waking hours. Here is a page from Miss Swift's journal:

"*January 10.* In the midst of a conversation on bread-making, she suddenly changed the subject by asking, 'Why does not God want you in heaven now? Does he know what you teach me? Does he know what I think? Do you? Try.' And then she held her forehead towards me, that I might read her thoughts. . . .

"*January 13.* [Laura] commenced her conversation by asking, 'Is salt made?' She was much interested in an account of it. Her next query was, 'How is gravy made? What is sauce made of? What is lead in my pencil? What is oil made of, and hair-oil, and rum, and camphor, and cologne? What would I do if I drank them?' When told that rum would make her sleepy, and she could not walk straight, she said, 'I was very sick in head last summer, and very sleepy, and walked crooked.' . . .

"*January 19.* . . . Dr. Jarvis came into the room, and she wished me to ask him if he had ever seen Indians. He told her a story of one which pleased her much. 'Why were Indians not white like us? Why do they wear blankets? Are they not sorry not to have clothes?' . . .

"*January 23.* A conversation on 'noises,' made necessary by her making so many of late. She attempted to justify herself by saying, 'Some of my noises are not bad, some are pretty noises. I must

make noises to call some one.' Then to divert attention as well as to get information, 'Why does wolf make bad noises?' After half an hour's talk she promised me to *try* to remember to be quiet, and during the rest of the day she did remember very well. In the latter part of the day she made a noise in a whisper, and said, 'That was with my tongue, I made your smooth noise.' . . .

"*January 27.* After coming into the school-room she sat still a moment. Some one was playing very softly on the organ in the hall above. She asked, 'Why does the house shake? What makes organ shake? Does it make a bad loud noise?' "

Her "noises" were all of her own; she had a different "noise" for every friend. I have already noticed the "Doc! Doc!" which never failed to greet my father. Some of the other greetings were uncouth, some unspellable; but all were distinct and individual. She also had a number of words which she was always ready to produce. "Pie" was one of them, I remember; she pronounced it "Pa—ee!" with much gusto. In later years, my father regretted that he had not taught her to articulate, which might, it would seem, easily have been done.

In 1852 my father writes to Horace Mann:

"There is one thing I want much to do, and with your active aid could do (that is, if I get the Idiot School fairly established and in public favor)—viz. establish a school for teaching the deaf-mutes to articulate. We have often talked of it, and I made

a spasmodic effort at it once; but I am wiser now, and with you could succeed. Mr. Weld's last visit here, and his avowal that they do virtually nothing except to those who have some hearing, made me see the necessity of some action."

Compound words often troubled her. One day, feeling ill, she said, "I am very strongless!"

On being corrected she said, "You say restless, when I do not sit still;" then after a moment's thought, "I am very weakful!"

The next entry records one of her few lapses from the "straight path:"

"*May 23.* I fear that Laura attempted to deceive me to-day in her work. At ten o'clock I sent her to knit. She was to commence a pitcher [purse], and I told her I wanted she should knit much. At twelve I went to give her a lesson, and asked her how much she had done. She said, 'I have done handle and neck,' changing it to 'and almost neck.' Her manner was peculiar, so I asked her to let me see it; she hesitated, but brought it, when I found instead of the neck being almost done, it was not yet entirely begun. Told her I would not give her a lesson again to-day, but she must think about deceiving. She worked steadily, but did not seem to be moved by this.

"*May 24.* Her mind was entirely occupied with the wrong of yesterday. She asked, 'Am I wrong many times?' She then repeated the history of the deception and said, 'I felt very bad yesterday,—bad

is sad. I want to learn to be good.' Asked if she thought she would be sad if she learned to be good. 'I do not think so.' After thinking awhile, she said, 'I want you to love me many times, much,' and burst into tears. It was some time before she became composed, but after that she was very gentle."

She was disposed to be critical of the other sex.

"Sumner is not gentle like Doctor. Why does Doctor want Sumner to come here if he is not gentle?"

In reply, Miss Swift used the word "like" instead of "love." Laura corrected her at once, and said, "*Like* is not *love!*"

Miss Swift explained the use of "like" in this sense.

"I do not like or love Sumner!" said Laura. "I do not care for him!"

Her thoughts frequently dwelt on God, on death, on heaven. This, be it remembered, was long before the "conversion" described in the last chapter.

"While talking about Eastern New York with the map before her, she stopped to ask, 'Do you want to see God? Do you want Him to want you now? Does He see us, does He know what I say to you? Do you think of Him? Do all people love God? How many bodies has God made? Ten thousand billion?' "

Being troubled one day by mosquitoes: "I think mosquitoes were very hungry. Why did God make mosquitoes to bite me? Was He wrong?"

"ASKING, ALWAYS ASKING!"

"Why did God make some people black? Do the negroes wash their hands? Because black does not get dirty very quick, and I thought they need not wash their hands very often."

"Are there people in the sun?" Being told "we could not know" (!),—"We can ask God when we go to heaven." This remark was repeated on being told that we did not know why Mercury and Venus had no moons; this time she added, "Does Orin know about it now?" Two years had passed since little Orin's death.

She takes a walk, "thinking much about God." On being promised a certain outing, if some one could be found to go with her, "Does God know who will take me? Is God ever surprised?"

"How do we know that God lives in heaven?" When told "we read it:" "How could God talk to men and tell them what to write in a book?" She made the noise she called "talking;" "was it this way?"

Asking, always asking!

CHAPTER VIII

SIDE LIGHTS

But the one talent must have just as much care as if it were ten.

S. G. Howe.

It is often one of the parent's hardest lessons, to learn to yield up timely and gracefully the authority which was once necessarily despotic, but which should soon become responsible, and soon after be abdicated altogether. The inner man will not go long on all fours, any more than will the outer man; it will get up, and insist upon walking about. If it cannot go openly and boldly, it will go slyly, and this of course makes it cowardly. You may as well refuse to let out the growing boy's trousers, as refuse larger and larger liberty to his growing individuality.

Ibid.

IN 1845, Laura being sixteen years old, Miss Sarah Wight became her teacher, and a new vista opened before her. All her teachers had been faithful, zealous, devoted; to these qualities Miss Wight added a gentle, spiritual nature, and quick and keen perceptions, which fitted her especially to watch over the difficult period of awakening womanhood. With what untiring devotion she pursued her arduous task her journals abundantly show.

A pleasant side light is thrown on Laura at this time by a letter written to me by my mother's sister, Mrs. Adolphe Mailliard.

"In the summers of 1845-46, I spent several months with your mother, and it was then that I saw so much of Laura. We sat beside each other at table, and I remember how carefully she washed the cups and saucers after breakfast, with much less effort than I should have made, and with a niceness and precision which would have satisfied the most fastidious housekeeper. When this task was over she generally sat down with her workbasket, and threading her needle by finding its eye with the tip of her tongue, would render good service in using it. She was hemming a set of sheets when we first worked together. She was fond of fancy work, and

even at that early age partly clothed herself, by the sale of her purses, watch-chains, etc. I soon lost all painful impressions in regard to her limited capacities, for she seemed literally 'one of us,' doing precisely what we did, with a quickness and dexterity which suggested a 'change of base,' in processes, not want of any of the senses. Laura was very fond of dress and ornaments, and delighted in borrowing our rings and bracelets for her own wrists and fingers. I saw her many years later, when we were both quite advanced in life, and was amazed by her repetition of the old search after ornaments. Finding neither rings nor bracelets, nor watch, nor breastpin, she wrote in my hand in a pathetic way, the question 'poor?' Her distress seemed so great that to comfort her I betrayed the savage ornaments in my ears. With great emphasis and no pity in her face, she instantly wrote the harsh word 'vain!' Through her delicate sense of touch, she was quite a connoisseur in the different fabrics of our dresses, and would invariably feel my skirt as we were seated at the dinner or tea-table, saying, if it was of silk or of very fine muslin: 'There is company today, I know, for you have on your best dress.' She explained to me also that in other ways she was aware of unusual numbers in the room. She knew of the increase by the atmosphere. . . .

"From time to time I read to her, occasionally in the Psalms, and I remember her earnest question: 'Do you ever pray?' The fatigue of reading to her

without greater practice in the finger language often drew from her the question: 'Are you very tired?' 'Yes, Laura, why do you think so?' I would ask. 'Because your fingers move so slowly.' As she talked with me, her hand was constantly passed over my face to find out whether I was amused and smiling. She had other ways also of judging of person's moods, and told me that between the quick vibrations under her feet and the way in which her hand was taken she could distinguish any haste or displeasure.

"I have very amusing recollections of a sea-bath which we took together, in which the tide was on the increase. Laura was soon conscious of this change, and asked me what made man push water so. I explained to her that the tide and the current were making the water rise, and she instantly asked: 'What, currant that grows in the garden?' "

In the autumn of 1845 Laura's health began to fail. She became thin and pale, "almost transparent;" her appetite failed entirely, and she could hardly be persuaded to take nourishment enough to keep her alive. She was placid and uncomplaining, but the spring of joy had failed. She seemed hardly conscious of her own weakness. Her mind was clear and active; she longed to study, and was fuller than ever of questionings about spiritual matters; but my father wisely forbade all conversation of this kind, which was always highly exciting to her. For some

time, my father says, "she walked without a shudder upon the brink of the grave." Yet he never lost hope.

Lessons of all kinds were given up, and a course of sea-bathing and horseback exercise took their place. The effect was all that "Doctor" hoped. Slowly but surely the color came back to Laura's cheek, the spring to her step. On January 1, 1846, Miss Wight notes in her journal:

"Laura was full of glee this morning. 'I am so very happy.' Why? 'I have resolved to be so good. I am so happy to be alive.' "

During the summer of this year Laura made a visit to her parents in Hanover, Miss Wight accompanying her. It was three or four years since she had been there, and at first she was inclined to be critical of the home ways and words.

"*Hanover, June 1846.* Laura came to me much excited. Her mother had been punishing Collina,[1] and her mother did not smile often, etc. Reminded her of her mother's numerous, perplexing cares, and she seemed partly satisfied. After thinking for some time, she said, 'Christ was the happiest man, he was always so good.' 'Do you think he used to cry and fret when he was a little boy?' 'Was he happy all his life?' I replied that he must have been happy because he was so good, but he was sad, too, sometimes, because so many people were ignorant and wicked. . . .

[1] A younger child.

"Laura appears very amiable and attentive to every one's wants, and exerts herself in particular to do everything in her power to add to my comfort and happiness. She sometimes asks me if she sets her brothers a good example. She evidently feels that she is an older sister.

"It was pleasant to see Laura with Mr. Tenney; she seemed to have entire confidence in him. During each visit that he made her she would wish to go to the barn in quest of eggs, as she was accustomed to do when a child. She would take his hand and go off alone with him with a childish confidence that I have rarely seen her manifest towards a gentleman. Though they never found any eggs she was never tired of going. Sunday night Laura's brother brought her a rose. She brought it to me expressing great delight. 'God is very kind to give us such fragrant, beautiful flowers.' 'Did he make this flower for *me?*' pointing to herself with emphasis. Answered that I was sure that he intended that she should enjoy the beautiful flowers and all the pleasant things about her. After further conversation on the same subject Laura said: 'I will write some new things for my brothers, to make them more wise.' She sat down and wrote the following very rapidly.

" 'I hope that you love God very much for he is so kind always: who supplies us with such beautiful flowers and many other things in the world. I love him extremely much he is so benevolent.

" 'You must exert yourselves to think of him how good and kind he is and that he loves all of his children and to have them do what he wishes them, we will all be very happy with him if we are always good and right as long as we live always.' "

During this period of uncertain health, her spirits varied with her bodily condition. Miss Wight's gentle influence was usually soothing and beneficent.

"Why was I not always so good with Swift?" she asked one day. (She seldom gave any benefit of "Miss" or "Mr." There was but one *title* for her: "Doctor!")

She writes in her journal:

"*29th. Aug.* i was very much gratified when miss wight commenced to teach me to day & she taught me at nine about in artumetic [arithmetic] & to cypher, at ten o'clock i shall resolve to be good & do what she advise or to forbid or require me always, we shall be very happy together."

One day Miss Swift, having left her for a time, returned to find her slamming the blinds with much noise. Feeling her teacher's gentle touch on her arm, she turned and said, "I was afraid some bad people and wild animals had killed you."

Poor child! she did not like to be left alone; yet it was often necessary for the teacher, exhausted by the constant "talking," to seek solitude for a time. After such a brief absence, Miss Wight notes one day:

"*Nov. 4.* When I returned she said soberly:

'Why do I have two thoughts? Why do I not do what my conscience tells me is right?' Told her I thought when she began to do wrong she was in play, and afterwards her firmness led her to continue to do wrong, though her conscience was telling her all the time that she was wrong. We talked much more than an hour about different motives. In conversations of this kind I think Laura takes a deeper interest than in anything else. When I told her it was time for her to have recess she said: 'I love you so dearly for teaching me many new things about thoughts.' "

Miss Wight felt it of paramount importance that Laura should learn self-control, and be helped to conquer the violent impulses which brought on occasional fits of temper. "Tantrums" is the good old word; there is no other so expressive.

Laura herself longed to be "better," and often pondered the question painfully.

"Why am I compelled to do wrong sometimes? Why does Oliver not do wrong as often as I do? Why do some people love to do wrong?" It was difficult to explain to her that merry, docile Oliver felt no desire to do wrong. No ardent, struggling spirit there; he accepted life as a plant accepts sunshine.

In 1847 Asa Tenney, Laura's earliest friend, died. A letter came telling the news of his death.

"As I read the letter her face was at first very red, and quickly pale again. 'I am very sad that my oldest

friend is dead—that I never can see him again. But I think he is much happier now, for he was always so good and kind to everybody.'

"She sat by me in silence, and then said, half inquiringly: 'I think Mr. Tenney can see us now.' She called to mind the many little kindnesses the poor old man had shown her, and thought of nothing else until the bells rang for church, when she prepared to go with me. She had in her possession a crape badge worn by Miss Drew when Harrison died, which she wished to wear.

"*Feb. 3rd.* Laura still thinks of Mr. Tenney. His death has affected her sensibly. I think beside her regret for him she feels the reality of death more than ever before. She asked: 'Do you think I shall be afraid when I am dying? I do not understand how people feel when they are dying.' Read to Laura the last ten verses of the 5th chapt. of St. Matthew. Her comment on the 48th verse was: 'Why cannot parents give their children pleasure when they have done wrong, as God does? He makes the sun shine so pleasantly on us in our wrong days.' "

During and after the annual visit to Hanover in 1847, Miss Wight notes:

"*June 1st.* . . . Laura is more calm and happier than during her visit of last year. Her health is much better, which is one great cause of it. She only troubles me by asking a great many unimportant questions when I am so tired and nervous that it is

only by a great effort that I can answer her patiently and pleasantly. The sight of Laura seemed to recall Mr. Tenney to the minds of all the people, and almost every one had some story to tell of Laura when she was a little thing and came to see them with Uncle Asa. . . .

"*June 29th.* Returned from Hanover to Boston. Laura has enjoyed her visit very much, but she made her preparations for leaving with great cheerfulness. . . .

"*July 13th.* I have observed in Laura several times lately a feeling of satisfaction with herself at her own improvement. I have tried to remove this in part by giving her examples of the greatest goodness and excellence that she may feel that there is yet something above her that she may attain, but her natural self-esteem joined in the consciousness of possessing many right and kind feelings often fills her heart with thankfulness that she is 'not as other men are.' . . .

"*Oct. 18th.* Returned from Wayland where L. has been with me for ten days; she has been joyous as the birds all day long. All who have seen her have been won to love her by her kindness and thoughtfulness of others. She is in fact becoming more of a companion every day, more gentle and joyous, more quiet and thoughtful. I can hardly feel that I am making any sacrifice in being with her now."

In Laura's own journals and letters of this and

succeeding years, capital letters begin to take their proper place. They had at first been avoided in teaching the blind children, for fear of confusing their minds. A new teacher, Miss Mary Paddock, who about this time brought a fresh breeze of youth and energy into the Institution, asked my father's permission to introduce this innovation; he consented, and was much pleased with the result. Some of the entries show the transition state.

"At ten Wight proposed to me that i could take a fine ride upon a pony it was a very beautiful day and i enjoyed it much. It reminded me of my best Father in heaven. He was extremely benevolent so as to despatch the sun and such a very delightful day."

"I studied Arithmetic very diligently at 8 o'clock, & then Miss Wight gave me a lesson from the Bible. a great many people that they are [who are] good or bad who press much salt upon the meat, so it will be good and not decay in 1 or 2 days. but if the salt lost its savor, then the meat would be decayed but not as worst as when the people are not good. Christ assured his disciples, Ye will be good, & have the righteousness you should see God in your mind. You will love our Father most of all in this world. God will bless all his children that they repent of their sins. They will be happier in heaven if they grow better & better constantly—so that our Father will certainly take care of them."

Here is the complete story of an April day:

"*April 7th.* I studied upon the little globe before breakfast I studied Arithmetic very fast at 8. & then Wight read to me from the Bible. It was the disciples who [were] despatched to preach to the jews. I was exceedingly interested in hearing it. We took a delightful walk upon the boards. It was a very beautiful & pleasant day. I read in the book much more & longer than usual. I read about the old and verenable hermit & little Henry. & the young shepherd & a lamb. I worked upon the chain in the recess until it was time for me to descend to the school room. Wight taught me a little on the map of europe. & then I had a pleasant conversation with 1 of my friends Mary Thayer in her desk. & walked also out on the piazza until it was dinner time. In the P.M. I completed the chain & then we prepared ourselves to go to Boston at 3. We made a few purchases. We walked home from Boston."

The most vivid picture of Laura's life in the next three years (1848, 1849, and 1850) is shown in these journals, from which I shall quote somewhat freely. They are full of terms of endearment for her teacher: "My dear Dove," "my dearest teacher," "my beloved Wight."

"*January 10.* As I was roused from slumber I thought that it was 5 o'clock I wondered to find the fire extinguished but took the cold bath promptly in the cold room. When Miss Wt. came to my dressing room I was struck with surprise to hear that it was breakfast time. Immediately after breakfast I re-

cited a lesson in Arithmetic. When I could not give up the right answer for a long time I felt discouraged with a smile upon my countenance. At quarter past 8 Miss Wt. repeated reading to me from the History about the second punic war between the Romans & Carthage. At the next recess I went to make the beds. . . . At 11 she instructed me a new lesson from Pierce's Geometry it appeared to me very difficult to puzzle out. . . . I exerted myself to articulate with the people, but I was inarticulatible or incomprehensible. I rejoiced that the basket [on which she was at work] was completed at after 4 o'clock. At last we all went to have a delightful walk upon the piazza, and then went to rock in the chinese junk merrily." (A delightful rocking boat in which the children enjoyed themselves without stint.)

"*January 11.* Miss Wt. read to me about Scipio's triumph &c. As I was repeating to her what she had read, I got impatient by pinching her fingers—which made her stop teaching at half past 9. I sat by her silently for awhile, & then Miss W. went away & left me alone. because I thought that it was best for me to be all alone to meditate upon controlling my bad impulses & making many efforts to do right. At 11 I took the Psalmps book [the Bible] & read in it about the lord's prayer. I knelt down & prayed unto God, it caused me repent very much. At 12 Miss W. came to me in my closet, & brought me here. I rejoiced to overcome wrong impulses. Miss W. conversed with me all about it."

Laura at the sewing-machine

Though separation from Miss Wight was a positive distress to her, Laura seems to have realized something of the strain involved in teaching and conversing with her. In May Miss Wight was obliged to take a vacation of several weeks. Laura says:

"I thought if Wt had a whole vacation as regularly as the [other] teachers and their pupils do then she would regain her health and strength so that she would have such a good resolution to instruct me much. I am very sorry and anxious that she should have a vacation every time the other people do. It is likely that she would have enjoyed her instruction much afterwards. I do not trust that she would have so perfect health and so much strength as myself for it is very unnatural to her. She can be very calm and cheerful instead of manifesting her activity and gayety but I cannot tell how she looks in her sweet countenance. I wish I could discern her expression. I am willing that she should be sedate and much less emphatic but I love to carress her very much indeed. My heavenly Father was so very kind to give me such a nice beautiful friend who has a very warm affectionate loving humble sociable sympathizing heart. I should love to have her visit me as frequently as she could when we are separated f[rom] e[ach] other."

The journals make frequent mention of the handiwork which occupied more and more of her time as she grew to womanhood. She had become a thor-

oughly accomplished needlewoman. Her "white seam" was a counsel of perfection, her darning a work of art. She was past mistress of knitting, crocheting, tatting. She kept her clothes and all her belongings in exquisite order, never tolerating a speck of dust or anything awry or out of place. She delighted in making little gifts for her friends, and also articles to sell. We have seen from Mrs. Mailliard's letter that even in early girlhood she partly clothed herself by the sale of her purses, watchchains, etc. She fully realized the value of money, and was eager to earn it. When Miss Frederika Bremer visited the Institution, Laura asked her whether she found that writing books "paid well." "Pretty well," was the reply. Laura rejoined eagerly, "Do you think that if I should write a book it would pay well?"

There were few things more fortunate in her life than the love of industry, which through life kept her from the tragedy of "vacant heart and hand and eye."

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLED WATERS

Miss Sarah Wight has continued to give all her time and attention to her education. She has been to her a constant companion, friend, teacher, and exemplar. She has devoted herself to Laura for years, by day and by night, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, with zeal, patience, and discretion, and has had a wholesome influence upon her mind, heart, and character. . . .

The lessons over, she dresses for dinner. . . . She is considerate about her appearance, but never anxious. She is fond of dress, but, with a tact that seems incomprehensible, she avoids every thing gaudy, odd, or in bad taste. There may be, and probably is, some thought with her about the impression which her appearance makes upon others,—something of that natural and proper desire which women have of improving the gifts of grace and beauty,—but she is hardly conscious of it. She would dress herself just as neatly and tastefully as usual in the morning, if she were sure that no one would see her during the day. Indeed, what to her is seeing,—she who lives in total darkness, and comprehends not what light is? The direct and instant motive with her is the gratification of a natural love of order, and sense of ideality, which have been cultivated until such gratification has become a necessity.

It is difficult to forego the pleasure of dwelling upon this pleasing trait,—this love of beauty for beauty's sake,—this lesser but essential virtue of the female character, without which other charms have no lasting power.

The love of being graceful and beautiful is not an offshoot of selfish vanity; it is not a weed springing up in the shallow soil of artificial society, and which can live only in the light of the human eye; it is a plant whose roots are far down in the depths of the human heart, and it can be made to grow, and bear goodly fruits, even in the darkness and stillness of an isolation as great as that in which Laura lives.

S. G. Howe.

THE affection between Laura and Miss Wight must be reckoned as—next to her relation to my father—the greatest joy of the blind girl's life; yet it led to what was perhaps (her isolation apart) the greatest sorrow. In 1850 Miss Wight became engaged to Mr. George Bond, a young man of character as high and lovable as her own. On his frequent visits in the course of his wooing, Miss Wight, always wishing to share her every pleasure with Laura, shared this also, keeping her in the room, and giving her some part in the conversation. Mr. Bond's kind heart was deeply touched by Laura's figure of unconscious pathos, and he joined heartily in Miss Wight's efforts to amuse and gratify her. Neither perceived till too late the danger to this sensitive and deeply affectionate heart. The poor girl mistook his kind words, the friendly pressure of his hand; she imagined that she was the one he sought; her heart, with all its wealth of unsatisfied longing, went out to him.

This soon became evident, and Miss Wight, full of sorrow, was obliged to tell Laura how matters really stood. More than this; while the girl's whole nature was still quivering under the shock, she must, it was felt, for her own sake, be made to understand

that in this relation, as in every other, she stood apart from other women; that the crown of earthly life was not for her.

We can easily imagine how gently, how tenderly, Miss Wight broke the painful news. When the message became clear to her, Laura's whole face changed; her trembling fingers spelled out the words: *"Am I not pretty?"*

It has seemed necessary to mention this episode as a feature of her development. Many years have passed, and Laura and her friends are gone; but the pathos of that moment remains, an arrow in the quivering heart of youth.

She took it quietly; her innate dignity and modesty came to her aid, and only the innocent-guilty couple and my father knew of the silent tragedy.

One by one Laura's friends and teachers married and left the Institution. She always took keen interest in every detail of wedding, trousseau, etc. On one occasion a bride was to be married from the Institution, and her trousseau was laid away on some shelves in the closet of Laura's room. Hearing a sound late at night, Miss Swift (this was under her régime) entered the room and found dresses, petticoats, lingerie, all spread out neatly and carefully.

"Laura," said Miss Swift, "it is eleven o'clock. What are you doing, and why are all these clothes spread about?"

"I have been trying them all on!" said Laura

Miss Wight was married in 1851, and Laura mourned her deeply. She writes to her mother:

"I hate to go without my most constant friend Wight. She kept weeping many times till she left me the 9th of Nov. She gave me a very beautiful and pure breast pin, just before I parted with her. I do not know how to govern myself while my best teacher visits in Portsmouth until next Spring. I love her half as much as if she was my wife. I did not know that my best teacher was to leave me so shortly until the day before she left me. I shuddered so much and worried sadly. I could not credit of renouncing my best wise teacher so soon."

After Miss Wight's departure, Miss Mary Paddock was much with Laura, and her notes at this time are full of interest. She made several visits at the Bridgman homestead in Hanover, while Laura was visiting her parents. One such visit was of vital importance in Laura's life. Shortly after Miss Wight's marriage, Laura being with her parents at the time, my father learned that some of her family were proposing to take her about the country, exhibiting her, and selling her so-called "autobiography," a brief record of the principal events of her life, written by her. My father was naturally indignant at the idea, and being unable to leave the Institution at the time, despatched Miss Paddock to Hanover to bring Laura back, and if possible to convince her parents of the disastrous effects that their proposed exploitation of her infirmity would

have on their child. My father himself was hardly swifter in action than Mary Paddock. She shot off like an arrow from the bow, and arrived at the farm late at night. Next morning, after the early breakfast and family prayers, the farmer said to his wife: "Well, Marm, we had better tell Miss Paddock what we have got in our heads about Laura, because she will know what Doctor's opinion would be."

The plan was unfolded. Miss Paddock listened intently, as if she had not heard of it before. Then, with a trenchant energy which was all her own, she said simply, "I *know* that Doctor would disapprove of any such plan!"

Daniel Bridgman, to his lasting honor, replied promptly, "That's enough then! Dr. Howe has made Laura what she is, and we have no right to do anything contrary to his judgment."

Harmony Bridgman and her sons protested, loath to relinquish a scheme which might, they thought, bring substantial increase to their slender income. I like to think that this plan originated with John Bridgman, the eldest son, of whom more hereafter. Fortunately the father stood firm. The plan was abandoned, and Laura was carried in triumph back to the Institution.

She was fond and proud of her father, though there was little or no intimacy between them.

Her journal (June 25, 1853) notes that "the noble Dr. came and hailed me most cordially with a few roses in his dear hand he presented to me I enjoyed

its fragrance very much more than can realize. He brought some glad tidings to me which delighted my whole frame greatly. he said that he had seen my dear Father at Concord, N. H., and that he was a Representative. I rejoice most truly that such an unexpected event should occur concerning my dear Father."

In spite of the unfortunate episode mentioned above my father soon after decided that it would be best for Laura to return permanently to her father's house. She was now in her twenty-third year, a woman grown in every way, self-reliant in all practical matters. It was no longer expedient to have one person devote her whole time to her; she was tenderly attached to her own family, and it was thought that a share in the household duties would prove a wholesome outlet for her restless energy, and a pleasant and congenial occupation. It was a natural thought, but a grave mistake, as my father was soon to realize. Laura went back, how willingly I do not know; if she felt misgivings, she kept them to herself.

The change was a violent one. From the long corridors and spacious halls of Perkins, to the narrow rooms of the New Hampshire farmhouse; from the constant companionship of cultivated elders and of young creatures reaching out like herself for new light, new interests, new occupations, to the "trivial round, the common task" of life in the quiet country household. Moreover, at Perkins, beside the vivid

and interesting life of the school there was a constant coming and going of visitors; philanthropists from near and far, often from across the water, brought to see Laura as one of the "sights" of the country, the evidence of an unparalleled achievement. Laura was keenly conscious of all this; her ardent spirit leaped to meet every newcomer; her first question in these years was apt to be, "Is he a Baptist?" If he was, she was prepared to greet him as a brother; in any case, she was interested in everything that concerned him—his clothes, his hair, his features. Every newcomer was a new world to be explored.

In exchange for this, she now had her own family, whom she had known all her life: her father, silent, kindly, busy all day on the farm; her mother, equally occupied with household tasks, with little spare time, even had she the inclination, for the long conversations for which her stiff and toil-worn fingers were ill adapted; the brothers and sisters, away at school through much of the day, busy with play or chores during the rest of it. We have no evidence of her attaining any intimacy with her brothers and sisters, though she longed to influence them for good, and felt keenly her responsibility as the elder sister. How far they responded to this we do not know. Nor do we know just when the dumb despair began to creep over her. At first she fought against the conditions that were stifling her. One day when her mother could not "talk" with her, Laura struck her, in one of those silent rages of which her teachers' journals

make such frequent mention. Probably Harmony Bridgman paid little attention to this outbreak. It is not recorded that she was ever angry with her afflicted child, as she always called her, but Laura was overcome with anguish at what she had done; brooded over it, and would not be comforted. Interest in life failed; she refused food, she wasted away; and her parents felt that she was fast going into what was in those days called a decline. Alarmed, they sent for my father, who came at once, and found his beloved pupil "a shadow of herself, dying of that subtle disease which we call homesickness."

For the moment all he could do was to soothe, comfort, cheer; but on returning home, he instantly sent Miss Paddock to bring Laura back to the home of her heart. It was mid-winter; Miss Paddock arrived at Lebanon, the nearest railroad town to Hanover, to find the roads so blocked with snow that it was impossible to make her way to the Bridgman farmhouse. Alone in the strange village, she might easily have been at a loss, but I never knew Mary Paddock at a loss. By great good fortune, Dr. Plaistridge, a country physician living near the railway station, heard of the young stranger who had come from Boston on an errand of mercy, and could get no farther. He took her to his home, where she was obliged to wait four days, till the roads became passable. When at last she reached Hanover, she found that Laura had taken to her bed after my father's departure, and had not left it

for many days. We can see the girl lying there, white and languid, the tide of life feebly ebbing from her; we can see the trim, alert figure, instinct with energy, enter the room, come swiftly to the bedside, take up the nerveless hand, and spell into it, "I have come to take you home." The color flooded back into Laura's face, she grasped the strong hand with feverish energy. "When do we start?" she asked. "As soon as you can eat an egg," was the reply. For some weeks Laura had refused all solid food, living solely on "crust coffee." The next morning she ate an egg.

In spite of the promise, it was evident that Laura was as yet far too weak to travel. Every day and all day she begged to be taken to Boston, but a week passed before this was possible. They finally started on a bright, sparkling winter day. When Daniel Bridgman carried his daughter out of the house, and placed her in the open sleigh, he "burst into tears, and sobbed aloud that it seemed like turning his own child out of doors." His wife, stronger and wiser, reproved him for this weakness. "The child will be happier and better off in Boston," she said.

Before they were halfway to Lebanon, Laura fell back in a dead faint. Miss Paddock's heart sank, but there was no turning back. The last words formed by the faltering fingers had been, "When shall we reach Boston?" A disappointment might mean the end of all.

They reached the house of the good physician,

and Laura was carried indoors "as one dead." Coming to herself after a while, and finding that the first stage of the journey was over, she was eager to start upon the next, and found it hard to bear the week of rest which Dr. Plaistridge thought absolutely necessary. Day by day the slender flame of life seemed flickering to extinction; day by day the indomitable spirit waked it anew. Her will never faltered for an instant. "To Boston, to Boston!" the cry went up day and night.

The week over, she was laid upon what was then called a "saloon sofa" in the car (I am not sure just what this was; it was long before the day of Pullman cars); and so, lying motionless but sensible, she made the journey. She could not lift her head, but she could move her fingers, and they flew faster and faster in eager questioning. "Would Doctor meet them?" "Was he glad she was coming?"—these two questions over and over again.

The day was bitter cold. Every one in the train became deeply interested. Could she be brought through? Would she reach Boston alive? They brought bricks, these good people, heated on the deadly little car stove, which some of us remember, and kept them at Laura's hands and feet, bringing them by relays. One of these Samaritans was the President of Dartmouth College. Let us hope the good deed was blessed to them all.

To Mary Paddock this journey was a nightmare that she never forgot through life. She despaired—

even she, to whom despair had been unknown—of getting Laura to the Institution alive. It was done. She was still breathing when they carried her into the little white chamber which had so long been her home, but as they laid her down on her little bed, they thought for a moment that the spirit had fled its prison. It was not so. Life and consciousness returned, slowly but steadily. With the whole cheerful community to watch and tend and nurse her, she slowly revived; slowly but surely recovered; took up her happy round of life once more.

CHAPTER X

NOON AND AFTERNOON

Forenoon and afternoon and night,—Forenoon,
And afternoon, and night,—
Forenoon, and—what?

The empty song repeats itself. No more?
Yea, that is Life: make this forenoon sublime,
This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,
And Time is conquered, and thy crown is won.

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL.

THE Institution was now Laura's permanent home. She visited her parents regularly in the summer, and was glad to do so, knowing that the autumn would bring her return to Perkins. She also usually spent some weeks with her old friend Mrs. Morton (Miss Drew) at Halifax, Massachusetts; but the greater part of the year was spent in the home of her heart. Here, though no longer under regular instruction, she led an active and extremely busy life. She joined in certain classes with the pupils, whose friendship and companionship she welcomed, in spite of the difference in years.

In 1853, when she was twenty-two years of age, a new friend came to brighten and enrich her life, Miss Maria C. Moulton, "Saint Moulton," as my father used to call her. Few canonized saints can have merited the title better. She was engaged as matron of the Institution; for thirty-eight years she was one of its guiding spirits, my father's faithful lieutenant and ally, the loyal friend and wise counselor of all who sought her, and who did not? Laura soon became deeply attached to her, and found constant pleasure in her company. "Wight" being gone, Miss Moulton perhaps ranked next to "Doctor" in her affections.

In 1854 Miss Moulton arranged a Christmas festival which Laura remembered all her life as one of its great occasions. My father was at the time living in his "part" of the Institution.

It may be supposed that Julia and "Flossy" Howe had some share in preparing the Christmas festival, as they entered with lively interest into all the Institution "doings."

In the centre of the large double drawing-room of the "Doctor's Part" a goodly Christmas tree was placed, decorated by active and loving hands. At a given signal my mother (always chief musician of any social occasion) sat down at the piano and struck up a stirring march. The doors flew open and in marched the blind pupils, two by two, followed by teachers, attendants, "help" (there were no "servants" at the Institution!), all the household, old and young, great and small. Among them came Laura, the Fairy Queen of the Festival, dressed in fluttering gauze and tinsel, seated in the Howe children's donkey carriage, which was filled with gifts, waving a gilded sceptre over the merry throng. Her face was radiant, her slender figure trembling with joy. A smile hovered on her lips, but was not allowed to break out. With royal dignity she presided over the distribution of gifts by her maids of honor. (They were all blind; they could not see the pretty gifts so merrily given and received; but the blind child has—almost invariably—a spring of joy

within, ready to bubble up at any simplest merry-making.)

Laura enjoyed it all to the full, but still her lips were pressed close together, and she maintained her air of radiant gravity.

"Why don't you laugh, Laura?" some one asked her.

Laura drew herself up, with a majestic air.

"It is not proper for a queen to laugh!" she said.

My elder sisters doubtless kept the memory of this festival in their hearts. I was—probably—present, being a child of four years old; but I have no recollection of it. I cannot remember when I first saw Laura; can remember no time when I had not seen her. I was her namesake, and she was always specially sweet and tender with me. I might—I *should*—have a host of special memory pictures, intimate and precious, of my intercourse with Laura. Alas! I took Laura as much for granted as anything else; the big globe in the rotunda, the big wheel in the printing room, the electrical apparatus in "Doctor's" office, where one received shocks, terrible and delightful. I knew she represented a miracle of my father's working, but there were so many of these! He was an altogether miraculous person. He had but to lift his finger, or to say "Fire away!" and things happened. So, Opportunity, with a glance over her shoulder, slipped by, and I have little to tell of a personal relation. Laura was always ready to take my hand in hers and patiently

receive my slow-spelled greetings, returning them with deliberate care, so that I could read her speech. No flying fingers for little Laura Howe!

Two brief, vivid instances I have preserved, which show that Laura herself had something of the miracle worker in her. In 1869 I became engaged to Henry Richards. Naturally one of the first calls I made in his company was upon Laura. He was much interested in seeing her, and I know that when he took her extended hand he meant to express cordial good will. Nevertheless, the handshake over, she turned instantly to seek a waiting hand beside her. "He is very reserved," she spelled.

A few years more, and my daughter Rosalind was taken to see her by Miss Moulton. I was not present and Laura had had no notice of the visit. The child was brought forward, and the butterfly-fingers fluttered about her, feeling of head, face, hands; then with a quick motion Laura spelled into the nearest hand, "Laura's child!"

One who knew her well notes that "she had quick perception of characteristics discovered through taking the hand. I do not mean to say that she analyzed a person's character, but that she was quickly aware of attractions or repulsions. She disliked very much to touch the hand of a child whose mentality was below normal."

Another friend notes: "Once a couple from Georgia came with their child. After presenting the man and woman to her, I said, 'And here is their

little girl.' After taking its hand, she spelled 'Boy!' I again said 'girl.' But she insisted 'Boy!' The parents corrected my mistake. Soon, she said, 'He is a fool.' So I had learned she could discover the sex and development and characteristics of its owner."

Here is still another anecdote, told by a blind woman who left Perkins fifty years ago:

"Laura asked me one day how a certain sick teacher was. I spelled into her hand: 'She is h-o-r-s-e.' Then didn't Laura pounce upon me? She gave me six real hard hits on my back and immediately afterwards so made me understand with her fingers that hoarse isn't spelled like horse that I've never forgotten."

In 1868 Daniel Bridgman died; an honest and kindly, but we must think a stupid man. He left the homestead to his eldest son, John, with the condition that he should give a home to Mrs. Bridgman and Laura as long as they lived. John Bridgman interpreted the will (which was, it was believed, made under his influence) in his own fashion. Harmony Bridgman, the mother who had borne, nursed, and reared him and four other children, who had ruled for fifty years with wise and kindly hand the little kingdom of her home, built up largely by her industry and ability, was now confined to one room of that home. Here she was henceforth to live and

sleep; here her solitary meals were sent up to her; here, when Laura wished to visit her mother, she too must live, sharing the one poor upper room.

It is difficult to write calmly of this; my father made no attempt to disguise his indignation. In 1874, rather more than a year before his death, he made public the following statement:

"I take this opportunity to say that Laura is now about forty-four years old. Her father has recently died; and the little property which he thoughtfully left for his widow, and this, the most dearly beloved of his children, has been very selfishly, ungenerously, and, as I think, unlawfully misappropriated by some relatives; so that Laura and her aged mother must bear such unkind treatment in the old homestead that they continue to live in it only through the lack of means of living elsewhere.

"Laura has for many years contrived to earn a little money by making bead-baskets and other trinkets; and she has the interest of two thousand dollars bequeathed to her by her excellent friends, Mrs. Abby, and her daughter, Abby M. Loring. She has also a home during the cold season at the Institution; but still she barely receives enough for necessary articles of dress, whereas she has a feminine delight in personal ornamentation: she loves to have showy and fashionable dresses, bonnets, and the like, and trinkets for her dressing-table; and it would give me great pleasure to gratify her innocent taste to a reasonable, and even to a little unreasonable, degree.

"Any persons disposed to make any addition to the Loring Fund can do so by remitting to me, or to the treasurer of the Institution, with explanations of their wishes."

(There was, it appears, no legal redress.)

Laura was deeply grieved at her father's death, and at the unhappy things that followed it. Meeting my mother shortly after, she made her little pathetic sound of grief, and said, "I have been disinherited!"

She writes that winter to Mrs. Bond:

"My dear Papa died in peace by Jesus the last Saturday of last Nov. my home is half broken I am in deep despair because of not meeting him again on earth. John & Wife never sit & talk with my poor & deserted Mother. I wish to meet her & to comfort her & cheer her up. I mean to hasten home in a vacation & be company for her all summer. dear Papa did not give me anything for my living latter days. I can hope & trust in God & Jesus. it will sorrow my heart adventuring in that sad place. . . ."

Again she writes:

"I feel sad to assure you that John & his Wife don't render a happy nor pleasant home toward Mother & myself. We cannot attain high enjoyment in this place. . . ."

It is good to realize that it was only during the summer vacation of the Institution that Laura was compelled to seek the dreary shelter of that upper room.

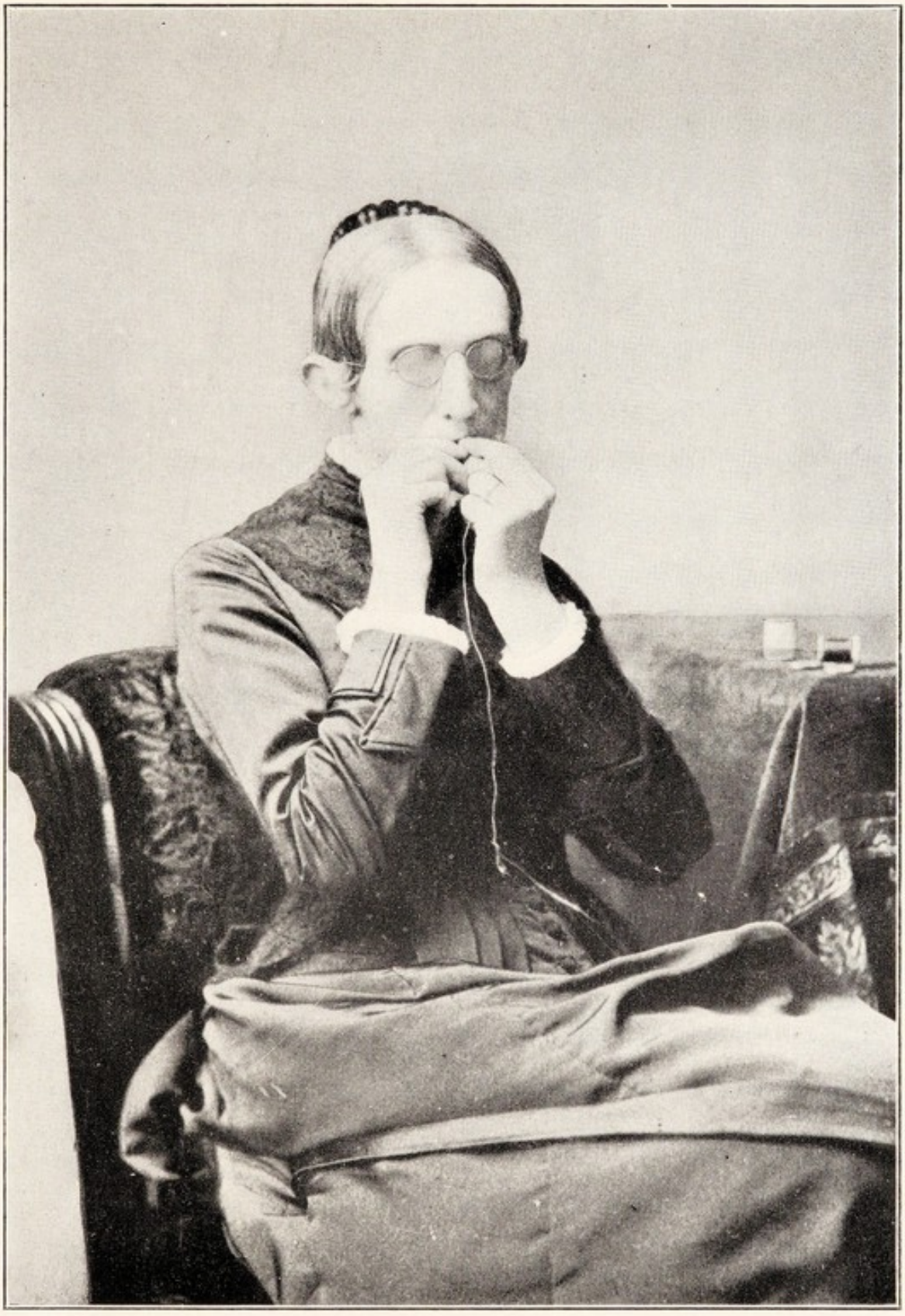
In January, 1876, my father, whose health had

been failing for some time, was stricken with a fatal seizure. He lay unconscious for several days, resting from his labors. His own children were at his bedside; they and my mother alike felt that the child of his spirit should be there too. Laura was brought. "She knew," says my mother, "that she was in his presence for the last time. She was allowed to touch his features very softly, and a little agonized sound, scarcely audible, alone broke the silence of the solemn scene. All who were present deeply felt the significance of this farewell." [1]

At first it was feared by those about her that Laura would soon follow her beloved friend. She drooped like a withered flower. To every one with whom she spoke she said: "I have lost my best friend!" At the mention of his name she grew pale, and pressing her hand on her heart, uttered that low piteous cry which seemed the very essence of grief. It wrung the hearts of all who heard, when at his funeral she was led forward to place a wreath on his coffin. One of those present describes it as a sound "the intensity of which it is impossible to describe. It was not loud but so shrilling. It seemed to embody the deep love and gratitude she felt for her benefactor, conveying to us all her deep feeling at her immeasurable loss."

A few weeks after, a great memorial meeting was held, to express the sorrow of the community in which and for which my father had lived and

[1] Julia Ward Howe, *Memoir of Dr. S. G. Howe.*



Laura threading a needle

worked. All eyes were turned to Laura, where she sat on the platform, "the silent orator of the occasion," in the words of Dr. Edward Everett Hale. No one who saw that figure will ever forget it.

The home of Laura's later years was in one of the cottages which my father had built in 1870 for the blind girls and their matrons. The "cottage system" had been long approved by him, and this was the first step in the establishment of it. The Institution proper was left to the boys, Miss Moulton presiding over it. At first the move was a painful one to Laura, but she soon grew accustomed to her new quarters, and even resigned to the further annual moving from cottage to cottage which was found advisable on many accounts.

Of these years many people have pleasant memories. A sheaf of letters lies before me, from one and another housemate of Laura's, giving their recollections. They were children or young girls then; they are elder women now, looking back across the years to the friendly, homely life at South Boston, before the new Perkins rose in its glory. One and all speak with lovely feeling of Laura; her cheerfulness, her exquisite neatness and love of order, her eagerness to help. She threaded the little girls' needless for them, with that magic touch of the tip of her tongue which I well remember; her fingers hovered deftly over their sewing, examining, correcting, instructing; no careless or slovenly work would

pass with her; out it must come, and be done again, neatly and carefully. She learned to run a sewing-machine, and enjoyed this greatly. She enjoyed sitting beside the piano in her cottage home while one of her favorites among the girl students was practising, every now and then stopping her knitting "to listen," as she said; that is, to get the vibration through her hand placed on the case. She was always ready for a walk or a talk; these are among the things her housemates recall with greatest pleasure. One of them notes:

"One thing she said on a certain Sabbath evening, which I have always remembered. She was talking about the future life, all at once she stopped and put her arms around my neck, and gave me a big motherly kiss. Then she said as we walked along, 'How happy poor Laura will be, when she gets to the Holy City! Then my eyes will be open, and my ears unstopped, and I shall see and hear everything. The good Father has promised this in his Holy Book, and will not forget Laura.'

"By the time she had said this, childlike I was in tears, and when she found it out, she patted my head, and said, 'Don't cry, little girl, for it will be beautiful, and Laura is ready to go, whenever the Master calls'."

When the Kindergarten for the Blind was founded by Michael Anagnos, Laura threw herself heart and soul into the work. "When a fair was held in the girls' department, to raise money for that object, she

sat all day, on a small platform, selling her handiwork and photographs, the proceeds of which she gave toward the kindergarten. She was delighted when we called her 'Queenie' as she sat there. She wrote an appeal for funds for the kindergarten which was copied into the newspapers, in her writing, to which she received many replies. One was from a small boy, sending twenty-seven cents which he and his boy friends had taken in, by a circus in his father's barn."

Laura always loved a festival or an "occasion;" never was there a more social nature than hers. Her good friends at South Boston decided that she should have a jubilee of her own, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of her coming to the Institution. Her fifty-eighth birthday was chosen, December 21, 1887. The great hall was hung with flowers; over the organ was a wonderful garland, with the inscription, "Obstacles are things to be overcome." The hall was filled to overflowing, friends old and new flocking to do honor to the Birthday Queen. On the platform sat Laura, tense and quivering with eagerness and delight; beside her my dear mother, and a group of eminent Bostonians. My mother presided, and as usual showed her gift of *le mot juste* in her opening remarks.

"We meet to-day at once to congratulate a friend, and to celebrate an achievement."

She then read aloud in her beautiful silver voice Laura's address of welcome:

"There was a little blind and deaf and dumb girl named Laura D. Bridgman, whose eye was shaded by a curtain from her childhood; then the curtain was drawn up by the hand of God, and her head was filled with light divine. She lived on an immense farm in Hanover, N.H. She was conducted to Boston by her parents at the age of seven years. A great and wise gentleman came to visit her at her own home. His name was Dr. S. G. Howe, of whom little Laura was so very shy; she was timid of his long hands when he took her tiny hands gently and kindly. Little Laura was shy when Charles Sumner and Dr. John Fisher and other gentlemen greeted her most cordially and kindly. She was so happy to live with Dr. Howe and his sister Jeannette for months.

"It was a joyous privilege for her to learn to spell on her tiny fingers. She learned to thread a darning needle by the aid of the first matron of the institution, whose name was Mrs. Smith. She loved her dearly. She used to rock on a rocking horse; she used to ride in a basket with wheels, the girls loved to draw her so much. She studied arithmetic, algebra, geography, history, astronomy, philosophy, and geometry when she was grown up. It was a blessing that she could accomplish various things. Besides doing duties for the matron and friends, she was happy to be the assistant of the teacher in the work school for many long terms. She hopes zealously that all children will be cared for with a loving

providence from our heavenly Father; also that they may love Him.

"It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all on the blest anniversary of my birthday. I praise the Lord for his loving kindness toward me. He has been merciful to enrich me with a home and many friends during this long, long life of fifty years. I have attained the enjoyment through the wondrous goodness of our heavenly Father. If Dr. Howe and Mrs. Morton and Miss Rogers and Mrs. Bond were on the wide earth, it would add the happiness of my greeting them at this jubilee. But the Lord is my joy, and I rely on him for real happiness. I loved Dr. Howe as well as an own father. He was a precious gift from above for my youth. He is more worthy than fine gold."

Laura was overcome by the magnitude of this festival. She had looked forward to it joyfully, had expected a pleasant gathering of friends and neighbors, with letters from absent ones; she was unprepared for this great throng of people, many of them persons whom it was an honor and a privilege to meet. Phillips Brooks, Dr. Hale—the list is a long one; and all with a word to say, a grasp of the hand in which was felt the warm pressure of interest and gratulation.

The crowning feature of the occasion was a surprise to Laura. A tree had been placed on the platform, laden with gifts and tokens of every description. Laura was led up to this, and her hand laid

on one of the branches. "Her surprise and delight," say my sisters,[2] "were something touching and beautiful. She fluttered about the branches like a sober brown butterfly, touching one and another of her pretty things, and uttering her expressive cries of joy. A gold bracelet, an ornament she had long wished to possess, was quickly discovered and clasped upon her wrist. Perhaps the superlative moment for her was that in which she touched and recognized a large music-box. On being consulted about the celebration of her birthday, Laura had made, as her only suggestion, the following remark: 'I would not like to dictate, but a music-box would make me very happy.' As she felt the long coveted treasure, it was noticed that she trembled violently. . . . She rapidly and skilfully set the music-box in motion and laughed aloud with joy as she felt its vibrations."

The memory of this festival brightened Laura's life to the end; she never tired of talking about it, describing it, recalling its delights.

The end was now not far. The year of 1888 passed in the usual quiet, cheerful way. "I am so happy, so busy," she wrote.

In April, 1889, her health began to fail; at first so gradually as to give no alarm; then more seriously. It soon became evident that the end was approaching. Laura, in the old telling phrase, "took to her bed," and lay there, pale and sweet, waiting. Kind friends

[2] Florence Howe Hall and Maud Howe Elliott, *Laura Bridgman.*

came and went, taking turns in reading to her and talking with her. "The Imitation of Christ," which she called "the peaceful book," lay beside her. She kissed it now and then, and welcomed with a lovely smile the reading of some favorite passage. She spoke little, and whereas in her usual health she had been used to make the most of any small ailment, she now seemed to make light of the grave symptoms, and answered to all inquires, "I think I am better."

In the last hour, two of her own sisters were with her, as well as a faithful friend, Mrs. M. A. Knowlton. The latter thus describes the scene:

"Thursday at midnight the sister who was with her was for a while deceived by her renewed strength and brightness. Laura had been lying prostrate for several hours with scarcely strength to swallow. Then she asked for wine and milk and wished to sit up. The sister raised her in bed and Laura drank a little, but in about fifteen minutes the sister saw the meaning of the sudden strength. At daybreak she called the other sister and summoned the doctor. I do not think Laura knew me again though she wanted to hold tightly to some one's hand. About nine o'clock on Friday morning she tried to make some letters, but her poor hand was already stiffening. After two efforts Mrs. Smith guessed the word from the four letters which Laura had succeeded in making, and very slowly spelled into Laura's hand m-o-t-h-e-r. She nodded twice and her lips relaxed a little. It was the last effort which she made toward

any communication. She simply ceased breathing a few minutes before twelve o'clock on Friday, May 24th."

There was another great gathering in the old hall of the Institution, many of those who had shared in the Jubilee two years before coming to take final leave of her. She lay among spring flowers placed by loving hands; at the head of the white coffin stood my father's bust; a garland of laurel fell from the bier to the pedestal, seeming to unite once more the teacher and pupil. The organ, whose solemn notes had always thrilled Laura's cabined senses, rolled out its requiem; the blind children sang their farewell hymn; sisters and friends clustered about the still, smiling face. Meantime, in that upper room of the New Hampshire farmhouse, Harmony Bridgman, old and feeble, awaited the homecoming of her child.

The story is told. Laura Bridgman and her deliverer have passed beyond earthly bounds, to wider fields of vision and of service; but the door remains open, for all mortals visited by her affliction, for all spirits kindled by his torch.

Looking with the inward eye on that viewless portal, I seem to see other figures passing through it: Helen Keller, with her brilliant mind and radiant personality; beautiful Elizabeth Robin, who chose the quiet paths of home for her life journey; Edith Thomas; and Thomas Stringer, the orphaned ward

of the Institution. These are all children of Perkins, personally known to me; but all the world over, wherever there is a school for the blind, there is a place in that school for the blind deaf-mute. On that day, nearly a hundred years ago, when my father saw the light of comprehension flash into Laura Bridgman's face, and felt her spirit thrill responsive to his own, a definite step was taken for all time, forward and upward, on the golden stairway of human progress. The light in that blind child's face still shines for us to-day.

As my father began this work, so let this brief record of it end with his words:

"The love and wisdom of our Heavenly Father are manifest not only in those gifted ones who seem fashioned most nearly in His likeness, but even in these broken fragments of humanity, which should therefore be carefully gathered up, that nothing be lost which His sanctifying fingers have touched."

THE END